CLASSIC POP PRESENTS

GEORGE MICHAEL

SPECIAL EDITION REMASTERED

Plus...

WHAM!
YOUNG GUNS GO FOR IT

GOTTA HAVE FAITH

FROM POP'S BAD BOY TO GLOBAL MUSIC ICON

PLUS! EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS • CLASSIC ALBUMS • TOP 40
UNRELEASED MUSIC • COLLABORATIONS • POP ART + AND MORE!

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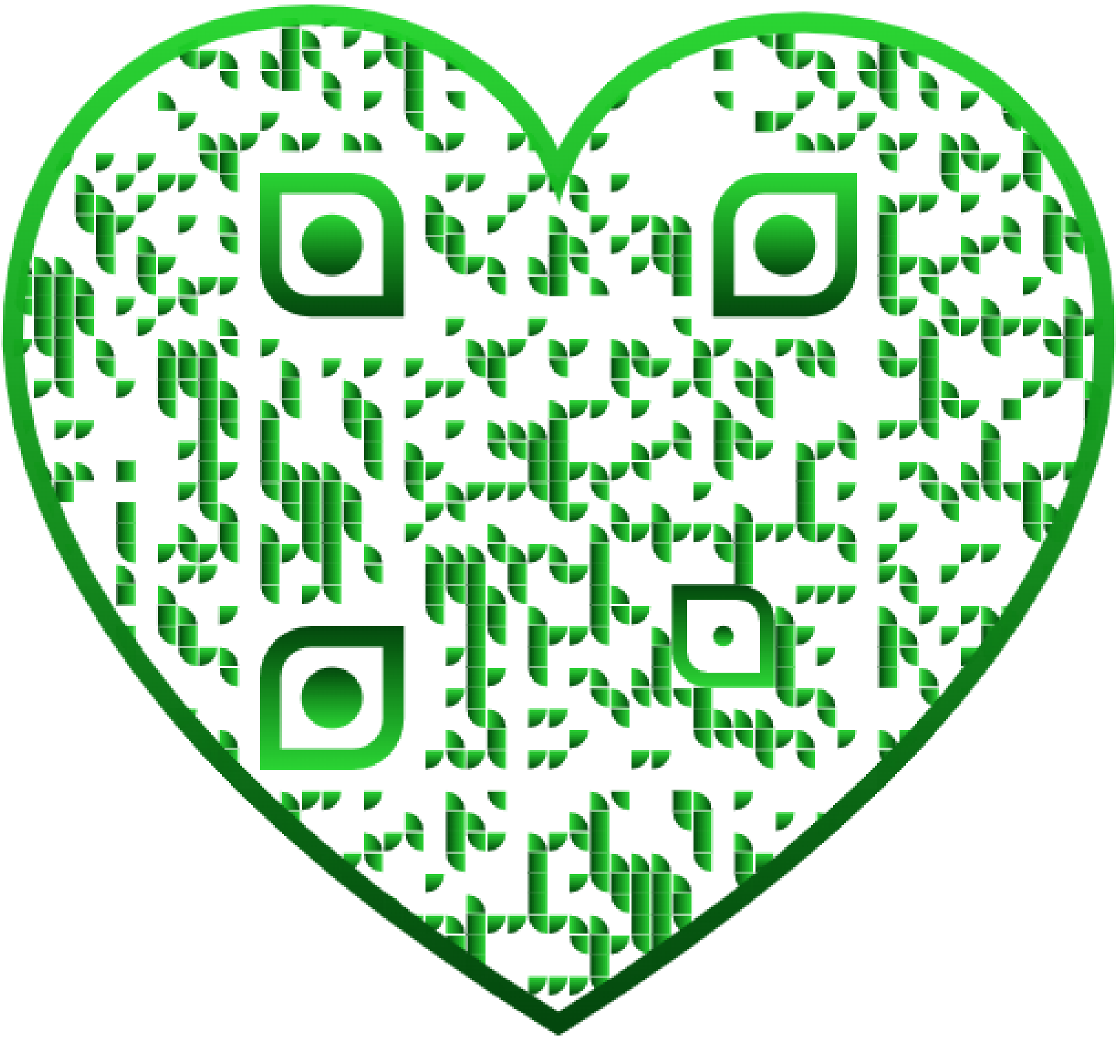

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CLASSIC POP

WELCOME

George Michael's life was full of iconic moments: the 'Choose Life' T-shirts in the *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go* video, awakening China to pop, the opening chords of *Faith* with George reborn in *that* leather jacket, blasting out *Somebody To Love* with Queen in tribute to Freddie, *Jesus To A Child* at the Brandenburg Gate…

Throughout his life, factions of the press would take it upon themselves to ensure George's memory was more about the drama than those incredible highs, but that was never going to happen. When he left us so tragically in December 2016, it was the sheer scope and genius of his music that ultimately resonated. And it continues to do so, be it within the carefree bars of *Club Tropicana*, the untethered exuberance of *Freedom 90*, the tongue-in-cheek audacity of *Outside*, or indeed the pin-drop poignance that was *One More Try*.

Far from the throwaway pop pin-up that some assumed him to be when Wham! shut up shop, George's talent, aspirations – and savvy – would carry him into the stratosphere, even if he wasn't that fond of what he found once there.

Beyond the fact that he was blessed with one of the voices of his generation, perhaps it's because he'd had that crystal-clear vision from the get-go that he is so universally loved. – Wham! was to embody youth, fun and freedom, and then, as had always been set in stone, he would move onwards and upwards to become a true giant in music. That leather jacket would go up in flames and the final era of George would begin, one of genre-spanning creativity and grand soul-searching projects – and life Outside. By then he was a living icon.

In a brand new feature, we speak to Wham! manager Simon Napier-Bell who was fully aware of the path that George would take from the start, albeit aided by a little bit of luck. From the *CP* archives are interviews with Andrew Ridgeley and Pepsi & Shirlie, who remember those magical early years, and from George's inner circle, co-writer and producer James Jackman tells us of his working life alongside the star. Also new, we tell the story of *Careless Whisper*, and George's rebirth as a solo artist, as well as revisiting Andrew Ridgeley's sole solo effort. Plus, all of the studio albums are covered, we offer up our Top 40 singles from George's 30-year career and we take a look at the sleeve art and videos that have augmented the music. Lastly, there's a newly-updated look at the unreleased material still in the archive.

Looking back to when the world lost George, it still weighs heavy. His narrative was one of big dreams, huge triumphs and heartbreaking lows. But in the end it comes down to his talent – *those* songs, *that* voice, a tender soul who gave far more than he ever took from this world. George Michael was one of the all-time greats. And no one can argue with that.

Rik

Rik Flynn, Editor

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THE CONTRIBUTORS ▶▶

▶Steve Harnell is Editor of *Classic Pop* and has written about music for more than 20 years. In this issue, Steve looks at George's classic albums *Listen Without Prejudice Vol.1* and *Older* as well as his 90s life and work.

▶John Earls has spent an inordinate amount of time casting his critical eye over the full spectrum of pop. Inside, he speaks to George's trusted co-writer and producer James Jackman and investigates the archives for unreleased gems.

▶Andy Jones has been writing about synthesizer music for possibly longer than the instrument has been around including helming *Music Tech* mag for many years. Inside this issue, he meets Wham! manager Simon Napier-Bell.

▶Mark Lindores has written for *Classic Pop, Mixmag* and many others. In this issue he takes on the early years of Wham! including both of the duo's albums, as well as taking a detailed look at George's breakout album *Faith*.

▶Andrew Dineley is the author of *Classic Pop's* regular Pop Art series. He has interviewed dozens of the creative legends behind many of music's most iconic record covers. Here, he dissects the sleeve art that accompanied George's catalogue.

▶Ian Wade achieved his ambition to write for *Smash Hits* in 1998 and has since worked for *The Quietus, The Guardian, The Sunday Times* as well as being a regular for *Classic Pop*. Inside, he offers up his Top 40 greatest duo-to-solo singles.

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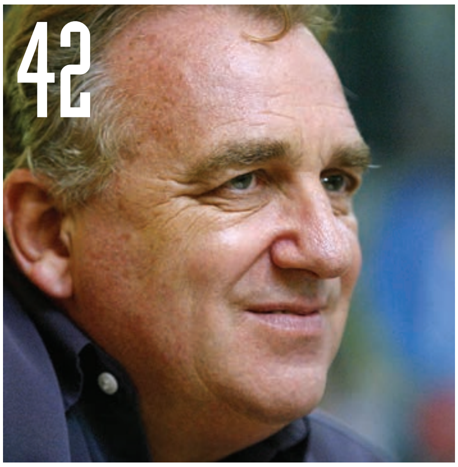

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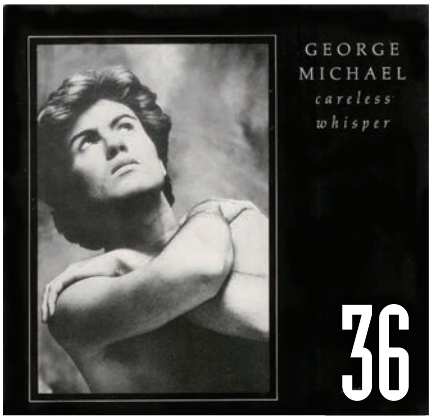

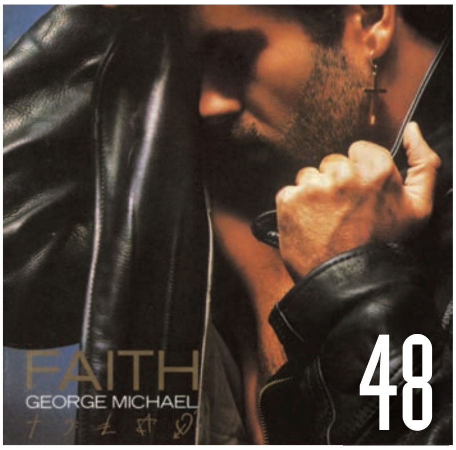

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MARK LINDORES

Bursting onto a music scene which had faded to grey in reflection of Britain's bleak economic landscape in 1982, Wham! – two perma-tanned pretty boys with dazzling smiles, tightly choreographed dance routines and chirpy songs about getting paid and getting laid – penetrated the charts and the magazines with a fresh, irresistible brand of soulful pop. Bringing a much-needed sense of fun and frivolity to proceedings, their breakthrough hit *Young Guns (Go For It!)* set the agenda for a record-breaking four-year stint as Britain's premier pop idols.

The antithesis of both the moody, so-serious New Romantics and the pop politicos earnestly fighting racism and the annihilation of workers' rights under Margaret Thatcher's divisive leadership, Wham! were an unabashed bundle of fun, a pair of good-time guys stealing the hearts – and the pocket money – of teenage girls with their fun-filled, infectious songs, colourful videos and heartthrob looks. With just two studio albums and a handful of irresistibly catchy singles, Wham! made it big in a spectacularly short period of time before the musical maverick at the heart of the outfit went on to make it even bigger as a solo artist, establishing himself as one of the greatest talents of his generation.

THE ODD COUPLE

The Wham! story began six years earlier at Bushey Meads School with the budding friendship of Andrew Ridgeley, the school's cool Jack the Lad, and new kid Georgios Kyriacos Panayiotou – at the time a shy, overweight introvert who found it difficult to make new friends. Seemingly polar opposites in every respect –

"Soft white sands, a blue lagoon..." **Andrew and George living the aspirational, perma-tanned Wham! dream in Ibiza in 1983**

© Photoshot

© Photoshot

© dpa picture alliance / Alamy

Happy days: this chirpy snap was used for the Japanese-market issue of *Club Tropicana* in 1983

looks, personality and outlook – their shared obsession with music was the catalyst that bound them together. They would make up dance routines, and record their own mock radio shows onto cassettes. Soon, their passion for music developed into writing their own songs, and for George this proved to be a vital new emotional outlet. His lack of confidence and inability to socialise meant he was living vicariously through Andrew, who was outgoing and sociable and enjoyed going to discos and picking up girls. George, meanwhile, spent most of his evenings at home or dutifully washing dishes in the kitchen of his father's Greek restaurant.

While artists such as Elton John, Stevie Wonder and the roster of Motown were George and Andrew's main early musical loves, the release of the movie *Saturday Night Fever* in 1977 had a profound effect on the pair, particularly George. Seduced by the sounds of disco and the confidence exuded by John Travolta's Tony Manero, he lost weight, bought some contact lenses and gained a whole load of confidence. Guided by Andrew, he threw himself into the disco scene, experiencing the euphoria of the clubs and their Bee Gees soundtrack. Before long, the *Saturday Night Fever* phenomenon stirred George and Andrew's own musical aspirations to the extent that they decided to form a band of their own.

"I had the motivation and George had the vision," Andrew later told the BBC. "I had to insist we get a band together because he wanted to do what his parents expected of him. We had talked about it for so long and he was saying 'after O-levels'… then it was 'after A-levels'… and in the end I had to say, 'No, George, it has to be *now*'. I wanted to make music and have fun."

As George had expected, the decision to pursue music as a career did not go down well with his strict father, who harboured desires of George following in his own footsteps and running the family business. "He just thought I was a dreamer," George later recalled. "I was obsessed with music, always had been, but it was inconceivable to him that I could earn a living doing it. This was a man who didn't have a musical bone in his body and just thought, 'What chance has this kid got of becoming a millionaire pop star?' The turning point came when we had a big argument because I said I wouldn't go to private school. He just lost interest after that."

While Andrew had previously been the motivational half when it came to musical ambition, George's father's dismissal of his son's dreams instilled in him a new determination. As well as spells on the dole (much to his father's fury), George took on a number of menial jobs to support himself, including working

> I HAD THE MOTIVATION AND GEORGE HAD THE VISION. I HAD TO SAY, "NO, GEORGE, IT HAS TO BE *NOW*"
>
> ANDREW RIDGELEY

on a building site, as a cinema usher, and as a DJ in a restaurant and a health club. However much he disliked the jobs, he was confident that they were a short-term arrangement and that he was simply supporting himself while he built his musical career.

TWO'S COMPANY

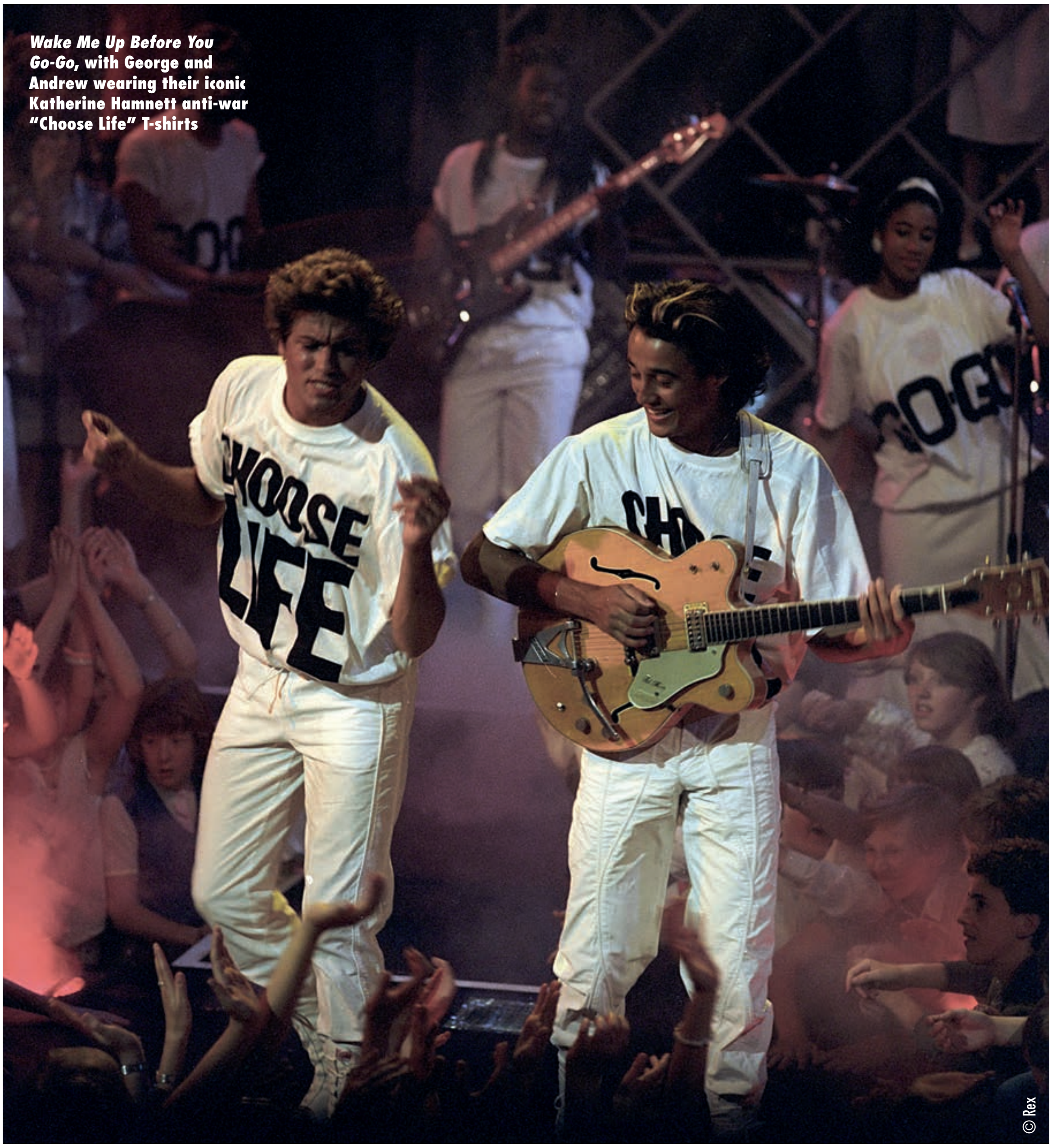
First, George and Andrew tried out various band incarnations, including a spell as a ska quintet called The Executive with Andrew's brother Paul, David Austin and another friend, Andrew Leaver (who would tragically die of cancer at the age of just 20). These Two-tone wannabes played local gigs and hawked a tape around record companies, to be met with resounding indifference.

George and Andrew settled on becoming a duo, with Andrew's girlfriend Shirlie Holliman and her friend Amanda Washburn as backing vocalists. Still without their own musical identity, Wham! recorded an eclectic four-track demo. Despite containing three tracks which would eventually become huge hits, *Careless Whisper*, *Wham Rap!* and *Club Tropicana* (future album track *Come On!* was the fourth song), the tape attracted little interest. There was, however, one exception – local A&R guy Mark Dean, who had recently had great success with Soft Cell and ABC and had just launched his own label, Innervision.

Dean instantly spotted the obvious potential of Wham! and was ruthless in his pursuit of their signatures on his contract. Taking advantage of their lack of business acumen, he dazzled them with his track record of two of pop's biggest success stories of the year, and spun them a line about having to sign the contract then and there in order to meet a deadline ensuring their record could be released that year. Blindsided by the prospect of imminent success, George and Andrew succumbed, unknowingly tying themselves into a contract which essentially owned them for the next five years.

As Wham! went into the studio to begin work on their debut album, backing singer Amanda Washburn left the band, promptly replaced by session singer Dee C Lee, who happened to be in the studio working with another artist at the time. As work began on the record, it soon became apparent that George was now the musical driving force behind the band. Though Andrew had contributed to the writing of *Wham Rap!* and *Club Tropicana*, the pair reached an agreement that George would become Wham!'s sole songwriter.

Wham! in their macho leather-jacket get-up, giving it their all to an audience in Glasgow



Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go, with George and Andrew wearing their iconic Katherine Hamnett anti-war "Choose Life" T-shirts

© Rex

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George in January 1985 during the duo's suitably-named world-spanning outing, The Big Tour

"I never regretted stepping back from the songwriting," Andrew later insisted. "He didn't need the help and he didn't want it. On occasions I did feel like I could have been more supportive, but he was getting on fine without it. The creative side took a back seat for me because he was doing a great job. We were going where we wanted to go."

Despite embarking on a hectic promo schedule which saw them play up to six club PAs per night, the boys' first single *Wham Rap!*, a politically-charged novelty rap track, failed to crack the Top 100 in June 1982. Innervision attributed the failure of *Wham Rap!* to the fact that the group hadn't yet established an identity and people were thus unable to connect with them. Disappointed but still optimistic, the boys put it down to experience and began planning a swift follow-up.

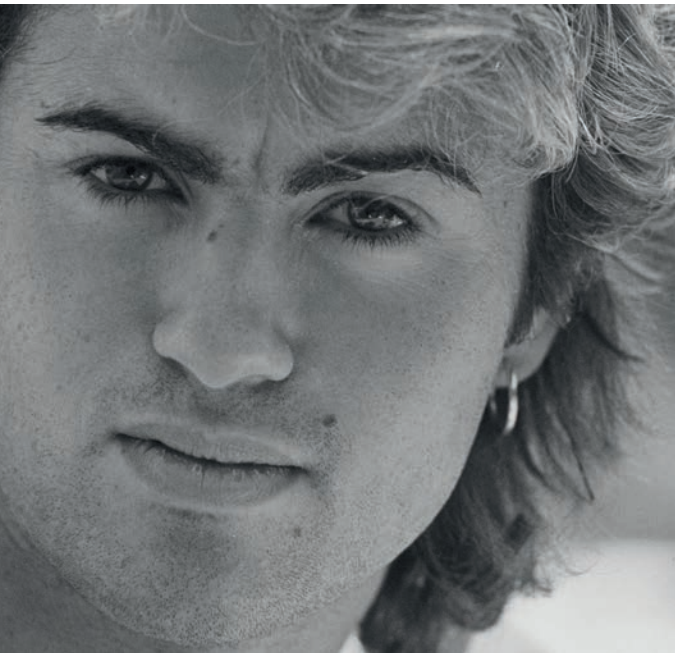
For the second single, *Young Guns (Go For It!)*, it was obviously imperative to create a recognisable Wham! branding. MTV, launched in 1981, had now established music videos as an invaluable marketing tool for artists to cultivate an image, and the good-looking duo took full advantage of it. As well as shooting a video, they flew to Corfu for promotional pictures casting the pair as party-loving playboys out for a good time.

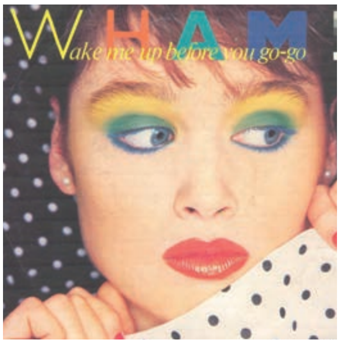
The photographs earned them coverage in the teen mags, which in turn landed them a promo spot on the BBC's Saturday morning TV show *Saturday Superstore*. Among the millions watching that appearance was a producer from *Top Of The Pops*. When an act pulled out of performing on the following Thursday's show, Wham! were drafted in as a last minute replacement, delivering the performance that would change their lives overnight.

SHOOTING FOR STARDOM

The *Top Of The Pops* performance of *Young Guns*, delivered like an excerpt from *West Side Story* soundtracked by Chic, was an instant sensation and

An outtake from the photo session for the *Make It Big* album cover





***Wake Me Up...* was kept off the top for a short while by Duran's *The Reflex*. Wham! never claimed it would "go in at No.1" – the quote was simply invented by reporters**

sent the single rocketing up the charts, peaking at No.3. Flirting up a storm with backing singers Dee and Shirlie, George and Andrew were living their dream, having gone from performing their dance routines in front of the TV to performing them on TV.

According to George, *Young Guns*' impact came as a huge relief. "Once we'd got that initial break, I knew we'd be fine," he said. "Once we got our foot in the door, no one would get us out."

His prophecy turned out to be true and the hits followed in quick succession with a remix of *Wham Rap!*, *Bad Boys* and *Club Tropicana* all following *Young Guns* into the Top 10, while the debut album, *Fantastic*, reached No.1 when it was released in July 1983.

Though *Fantastic*'s success seemed almost inevitable, the release almost didn't happen at all. Despite enjoying a swift succession of hit singles, the boys were disgusted to discover that they still apparently had no money at all, being forced to live on an allowance of £40 per week from Innervision. Forced into revolt by this meagre sum, they confronted Mark Dean, who flatly refused to increase it. Furious, George stole the master tapes of the album and essentially held them to ransom until he and Andrew were given more cash.

Although an agreement was reached, the episode set alarm bells ringing and marked the beginning of a series of changes within the Wham! camp. Helen 'Pepsi' DeMacque joined the band as backing singer after Dee C Lee left to forge a solo career and to become a full-time member of The Style Council, and industry heavyweights Jazz Summers and Simon Napier-Bell were enlisted as Wham!'s management.

With decades of experience under his belt, Napier-Bell's first job was the task of freeing them from the tyrannical terms of their Innervision deal. As Wham! were silenced by the legal wrangling to get them out of their contract, they hit the road for their first tour (a jaunt sponsored by sportswear label Fila, which George and Andrew wore onstage throughout the tour). The 30-date Club Fantastic tour was intended to raise money to pay for legal fees and to maintain Wham!'s profile while they weren't allowed to record new material. The tour cemented the group's status as pop's hottest property, sparking Beatlemania-style fan hysteria wherever they went. As well as the debut performances of *Careless Whisper* during the shows, the tour's main talking point came when the duo pulled shuttlecocks out of their shorts and batted them into the hysterical audience.

A BIGGER SPLASH

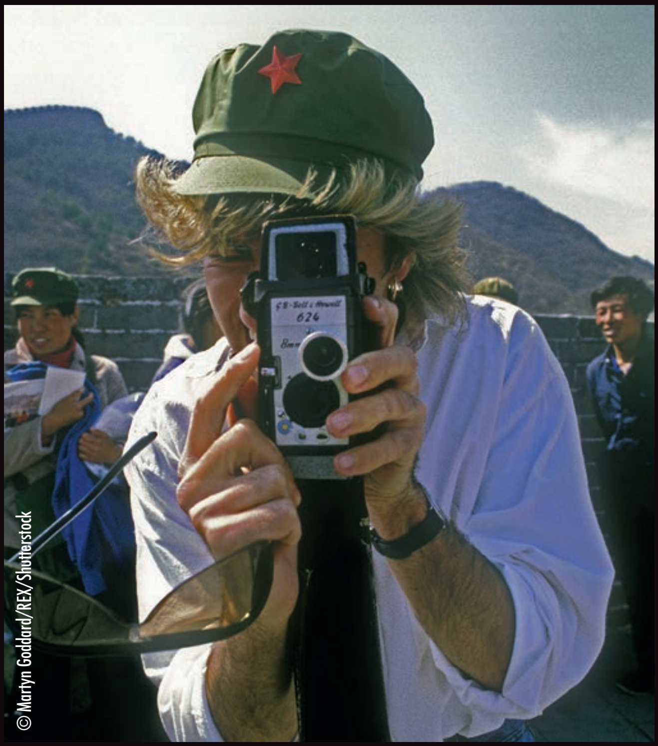
As 1983 drew to a close, so did Wham!'s first chapter. Following the tour, they flew to Provence to begin work on their second album. George continued readying songs for when they were free to record again, while Andrew continued to live up to his reputation as a professional playboy, his exploits earning him the moniker 'Randy Andy' in the tabloids.

Meanwhile, back home, lawyers for both parties eventually reached an agreement that Wham!'s contract had been unreasonably exploitative on Mark Dean's side. Dean landed an out-of-court settlement, and Wham! signed a deal with Epic Records.

With a new label, new sound and new image, 1984's rebranding of Wham! saw them achieve success beyond their wildest dreams. The lead single from the new album, *Wake Me Up Before You*

WHAM IN CHINA

A CULTURAL EVOLUTION



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When George and Andrew touched down in China in April 1985 to perform a pair of historic concerts, they were poised to deliver an enormous culture shock to a country still emerging from the trauma of the Cultural Revolution. Scheduled as part of their worldwide The Big Tour, the concerts were the result of 18 months of Wham! manager Simon Napier-Bell's attempts to persuade the Communist authorities that the country was ready for Western pop culture, and that it would be beneficial for China as it opened to the world and tried to attract foreign investment.

Though the Chinese were receptive to the idea of allowing a Western act to play the first concert in their country, Wham! faced competition from Queen and The Rolling Stones. After the Stones' two decades of hedonistic behaviour ruled them out of the running, Napier-Bell resorted to dirty tricks to ensure his act landed the concerts, feeding the Chinese authorities tales of Queen's own bad behaviour while presenting his act as clean-cut boys next door. The tactic worked, and Wham! were booked to play two gigs in China – one in Beijing and one in Canton. Concert-goers were to be given cassettes featuring Wham!'s music on one side and Chinese modified versions on the other.

As the first concert got underway in Beijing on 7 April 1985, Wham! and the 15,000-strong audience were equally bemused as how to behave. The audience, having never experienced a concert as loud and theatrical as this, sat rigidly in their seats and clapped politely between songs. George, unaware that they had been ordered to behave that way, attempted to whip the crowd into a frenzy, despite the fact that armed police patrolled the aisles.

Aside from the actual shows, the trip was a massive coup for Wham!, the prestige guaranteeing them money-can't-buy publicity around the world, with fabulous photo-opportunities including the Great Wall of China, playing soccer, meeting Communist Party officials, and being guests of honour at a reception at the British Embassy. "In the end everybody got what they wanted from it – Wham! became the biggest, most famous band in the world, and the Chinese got a concert that proved they meant what they said about opening up," Napier-Bell said.

A camera crew followed the band throughout the trip, and the resulting film was shown on big screens at Wembley Stadium before the boys took to the stage for their Final concert. It was later released as a VHS, *Foreign Skies: Wham! In China*.

Boys abroad: Andrew and George at the Great Wall of China. Despite the visit's heavily-controlled atmosphere, Chinese people genuinely recognise the concerts as a pop awakening for the country

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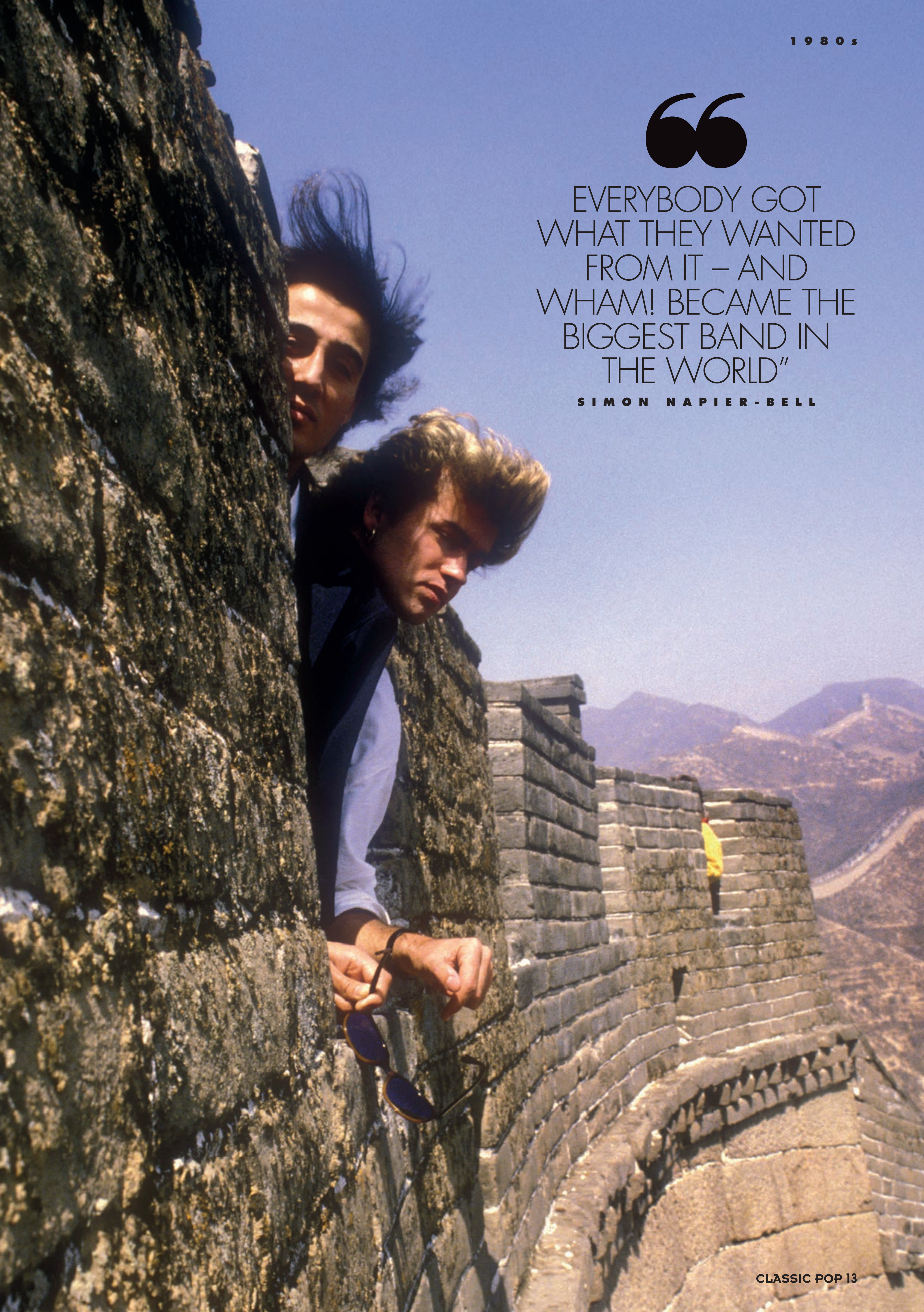


"EVERYBODY GOT WHAT THEY WANTED FROM IT – AND WHAM! BECAME THE BIGGEST BAND IN THE WORLD"

SIMON NAPIER-BELL

Last Christmas was recorded in August 1984, with George playing every single instrument. Ironically, it was also to be his last-ever beard-free release.

© Alamy

"I COULDN'T BELIEVE PEOPLE COULDN'T SEE PAST THE IMAGE AND APPRECIATE THE MUSIC THIS 20-YEAR OLD WAS MAKING"

GEORGE MICHAEL

Helen 'Pepsi' DeMacque and Shirlie Holliman on stage in Japan, 1985. Their '87 single *Heartache* was a UK No.2.

Go-Go, was an unabashed slice of pure pop that was more Cliff Richard than cutting edge. The video saw a softening of their image, with a dewy-eyed George cooing into the camera, all blond highlights, gold hoop earrings and Day-Glo sportswear, before donning a white Katherine Hamnett 'Choose Life' slogan T-shirt for a cheesy dance routine. The song cast Wham! as pop's 'good guys' in direct riposte to the filth and the fury of the villainous Frankie Goes To Hollywood, and it became their first No.1 hit.

Post-makeover, Wham! seemed unstoppable. George's debut solo single *Careless Whisper* and Wham!'s *Freedom* completed a hat-trick of No.1 singles, ensuring massive sales for the second album, the appropriately-titled *Make It Big* in November 1984. The same month, George contributed vocals to Band Aid's *Do They Know It's Christmas?*, ending the year at No.1 and No.2 respectively in the singles chart as the double A-side *Last Christmas/Everything She Wants* held firmly on the Christmas runner-up spot behind Band Aid. Wham! donated all the royalties from the single to the Ethiopia Appeal. With sales of 1.8 million copies, *Last Christmas* held the spot as the biggest-selling single in chart history not to reach No.1 until January 2021 when it managed the feat 37 years after first being denied.

George later revealed that he felt Wham! were treated as "a bit of a joke" by their peers, and he felt uncomfortable during the recording of the Band Aid single, with whispers and in-jokes being made at his expense. "I couldn't believe people couldn't see past the image and appreciate the music that this 20-year old kid was making," he told VH1 in 2004. "What I was doing was remarkable… I was writing, producing and arranging these records, and I knew how to make them jump out of the radio. The idea that the fact that I was wearing stupid shorts and big earrings stopped people from noticing that is stunning to me."

While George was made to feel inferior by some of his peers at the *Band Aid* session, by 1985 he

THE KEY RECORDINGS

GEORGE AND ANDREW'S PICTURES WERE BLU-TACKED TO A MILLION WALLS, BUT THERE WERE SIGNS OF FAR LOFTIER AMBITIONS

FANTASTIC
1983

Wham! released their debut album in the summer of 1983. Having notched up four Top 10 singles and amassed legions of fans thanks to their relentless promo schedule, the poster boys of 80s pop were primed for success. Their blend of frothy funk, pop and rap had been gleaned from London clubs such as Le Beat Route, and their 'baby biker' image combined fun – as on *Young Guns (Go For It)* and *Wham Rap! (Enjoy What You Do)* – with teenage rebellion, which came into play on the parent-baiting *Bad Boys*. *Club Tropicana* rode the wave of Club 18-30 and showed their more carefree, playful side, while George's promise as a balladeer was displayed on *Nothing Looks The Same In The Light* (see p20).

CARELESS WHISPER
1984

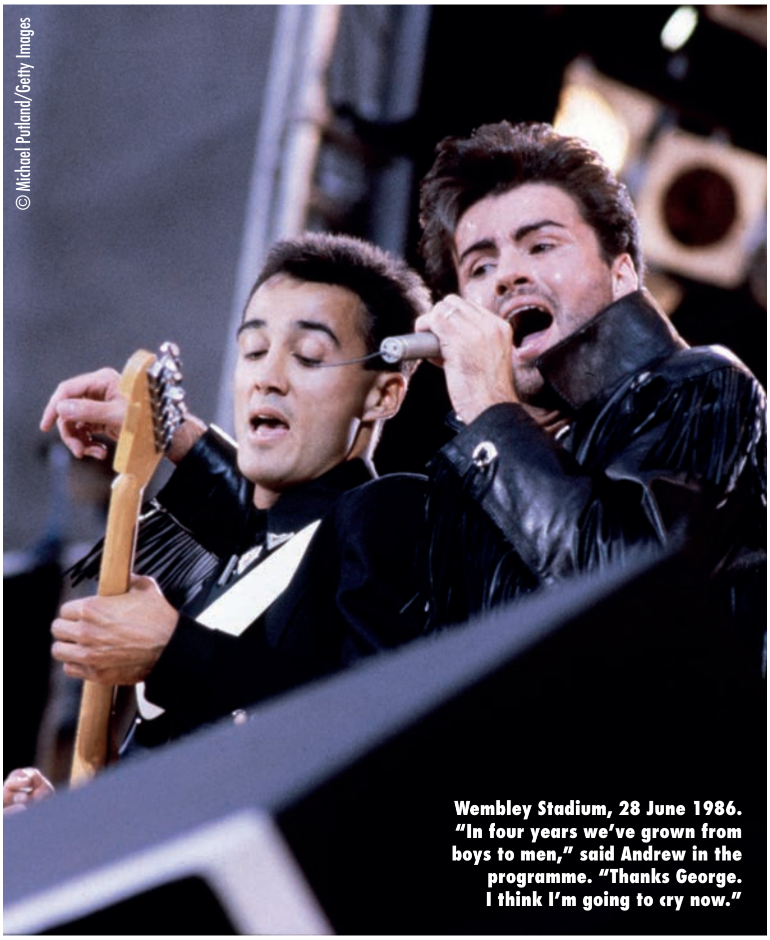
George's first solo single *Careless Whisper* was penned in 1981 by George and Andrew and was included on their demo tape. Semi-autobiographical, and remarkably mature, *Careless Whisper* is sung from the viewpoint of a remorseful cheating lover, and features an instantly recognisable sax riff which George dreamed up on the bus on his way to work. Unhappy with the first version produced by Jerry Wexler at the legendary Muscle Shoals Studios, George re-recorded and self-produced the track on his return to the UK. Often seen as his signature hit, it sold over six million copies and reached No.1 in 26 countries, variously credited to George alone, or 'Wham! featuring George Michael' (see p36).

MAKE IT BIG
1984

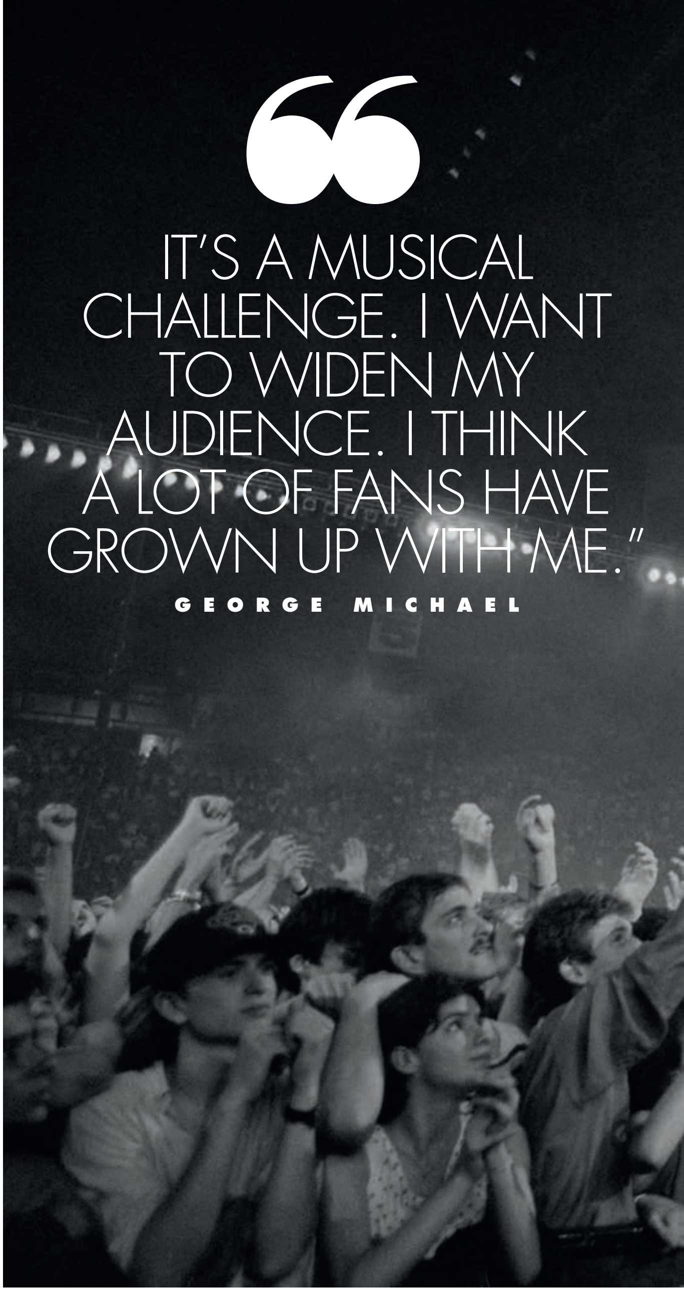
Perfectly-titled and unashamedly poppy, *Make It Big* delivered one of the greatest singles runs of the 80s, with *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go*, *Careless Whisper*, *Freedom* and *Everything She Wants* proving near-unstoppable. *Heartbeat* and *Credit Card Baby* were joyous and Motown-inspired; *Like A Baby* hinted at George's future mature side, and the album is rounded off with a cover of The Isley Brothers' *If You Were There*. Though proud of the album (even though he later expressed his embarrassment over *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go)*, George later admitted to having considerable reservations about his image at the time, describing *Make It Big*'s presentation as "consistently naff" (see p24).

FAITH
1987

The 25 million-selling *Faith* is crammed with songs clearly stylistically geared towards America, encompassing genres ranging from rock'n'roll, R&B, soul, funk and gospel to jazz. The title track was based around the classic American rock'n'roll sound; *Look At Your Hands* was a soulful throwdown, while the funk-driven *Hard Day*, *Monkey* and *I Want Your Sex* trilogy showed how serious George was about competing with Prince. The heart of the album, however, are the three ballads which explore feelings of loneliness and isolation. The yearning *One More Try*, the gospel-infused *Father Figure* and the jazzy torch song *Kissing A Fool* all exemplify George at his creative and commercial peak (see p48).



Wembley Stadium, 28 June 1986. "In four years we've grown from boys to men," said Andrew in the programme. "Thanks George. I think I'm going to cry now."



"IT'S A MUSICAL CHALLENGE. I WANT TO WIDEN MY AUDIENCE. I THINK A LOT OF FANS HAVE GROWN UP WITH ME."

GEORGE MICHAEL

was beginning to feel validated by an Ivor Novello songwriting award and invitations from his musical heroes to work with them. He held his own against Smokey Robinson and Stevie Wonder at a Motown tribute concert at the legendary Harlem Apollo Theater, and was invited to perform *Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me* with Elton John at Live Aid. The pair became friends, and George recorded backing vocals for Elton's *Nikita* and *Wrap Her Up*.

Below: *I'm Your Man*, which George would revisit in 1996 for *Fastlove*'s B-side, and *Jive Talkin'* with second cousin Andros, Nick Heyward, Mick Talbot and others

STEPPING OUT

In the midst of The Big Tour – a mammoth jaunt which saw Wham! perform in the UK, Australia, China and, importantly, the US, where they had sold six million copies of *Make It Big*, had three No.1 singles and were playing to 60,000 fans in stadiums – George began to grow disillusioned. After singing with his idols, he was feeling trapped… not only by the music he was making but also by the image of Wham!, finding himself living out the group's media personality by indulging in countless empty sexual encounters to mask the confusion he was experiencing over his sexuality.

Unfulfilled personally and creatively, following the release of *I'm Your Man* in September 1985 George shelved plans to write and record a third Wham! album and refused to participate in a deal to endorse Pepsi, which would have earned Wham! £3.3 million. He'd been shouldering the bulk of the work alone while Andrew reaped the rewards, constantly partying and enjoying his hedonistic lifestyle. Craving credibility

George performing on stage during the Japanese and Australasian leg of his Faith World Tour © Photo by Michael Putland/Getty Images

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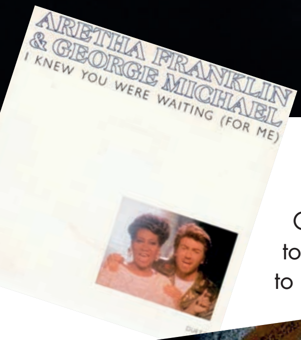
© Michael Putland/Getty Images

Above: George in Rotterdam Left: captured during the opening leg of the Faith world tour, February-March 1988



In just over 12 months, George moved from under Wham!'s umbrella to making a smash with hero Aretha, to his hot-under-the-covers second solo hit single, *I Want Your Sex*

and the freedom to be more personally honest in his work, George made the decision: he had to strike out on his own. His second solo single, *A Different Corner,* gave him his second solo No.1 hit before he re-joined Andrew for Wham!'s big send-off.

Throughout the early months of 1986, Wham!'s final recordings were compiled on *The Edge Of Heaven* EP and *The Final* – a collection of all their singles to date, including George's two solo hits, released to coincide with The Final concert at London's Wembley Stadium. Taking place on 28 June 1986, 'Whambley' was an emotional celebration of three remarkable years which included all the hits, special guests and surprises throughout the day… the perfect finale.

While Andrew struggled post-Wham!, indulging in his passions for surfing and Formula 1 racing (he later released an unsuccessful solo album, *Son Of Albert* – see p40), George threw himself into work. In January 1987 he scored yet another No.1 hit, this time with *I Knew You Were Waiting (For Me)*, a duet with another of his idols, Aretha Franklin. These invitations to perform alongside his idols were proof he had earned their respect, and his debut album was a vehicle to match them sales-wise, too.

Having already began work on his debut solo record once Wham! was laid to rest, George felt a sense of liberation and freedom to express himself in a way he hadn't felt able to before. Holed up in studios in London and Denmark, he began to exert full creative control, writing and producing the album himself. Aside from his own album, he remixed and contributed uncredited vocals to a cover of *Jive Talkin'* for his cousin's band Boogie Box High, a tribute to the Gibb brothers, whose *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack had affected him so deeply a decade earlier.

Keen to distance himself from the teenybopper image of Wham! – "It's a musical challenge. I want to widen my audience. I think a lot of Wham! fans have grown up with me," he suggested to Dutch TV programme *Countdown* – George launched his career with a controversial single and video which were banned by the BBC. The funk-driven *I Want Your Sex* was a calculated effort to reinvent himself, and it brought him a whole new audience. Though the sexually-charged song got people talking, it could be argued that the shock tactics were unnecessary; indeed, they may have proved almost detrimental to the *Faith* album,

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"VIDEOS ARE 50 PER CENT OF THE PLAN. BUT IF YOU WANT TO PROVE YOURSELF, YOU HAVE TO GO TO ALL THESE PLACES"

GEORGE MICHAEL

Seeking sanctuary: blocking out the world with his Walkman on the bullet train in Japan during the Faith tour, February 1988

a mature, eclectic collection which straddled rock, gospel, R&B and jazz and which saw George being mentioned alongside music giants such as Madonna, Prince and Michael Jackson.

The album was a colossus. It topped the UK album chart and spawned six singles; in the US it spent 12 weeks at No.1 on the Billboard chart, and four of its singles hit the top spot. The tour kept him on the road for nine months: "Videos are 50 per cent of the plan. But if you want to prove yourself as an artist, you have to go to all these places," he told MTV. But he later described the tour as "bad trip number two".

Yet again, George had created a persona in which he would feel imprisoned. Without the support of Andrew and the Wham! family, his feelings of isolation and loneliness were compounded, leaving him overexposed and mentally vulnerable.

George retreated from the public view after the tour to work on his next album, which he vowed to present in a markedly different way than *Faith*, spending the remainder of the 80s laying himself bare on an introspective collection of songs in which he felt that everything he had to say was included in the record's lyrics. This time, he told his record company, he would not promote the album, instead leaving the music to speak for itself.

Having achieved fame and fortune and yet having found himself creatively and personally unfulfilled, his next endeavour, George knew, required a different approach… regardless of the consequences. ■

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CLASSIC ALBUM

FANTASTIC
WHAM!

SPEEDOS, SHUTTLECOCKS AND EXUBERANT, LIFE-AFFIRMING TUNES – WHEN GEORGE MICHAEL AND ANDREW RIDGELEY EXPLODED ONTO THE SCENE WITH THEIR DEBUT ALBUM, THE POP WORLD DIDN'T QUITE KNOW WHAT HAD HIT IT…

MARK LINDORES

Let us take you to a place where membership's a smiling face. In December 1982, Wham! made their debut on *Top Of The Pops*, performing their second single, *Young Guns (Go For It!)*, an appearance that encapsulated everything with which the duo would later become synonymous. With their clean-cut looks, catchy hooks and irresistible sense of fun, that watershed performance catapulted them into the homes – and hearts – of teenage girls nationwide, firmly establishing them as (shuttlecock jokes aside) the perfect pop package.

George Michael and Andrew Ridgeley's ascent from the DHSS to *TOTP* had been a rapid one. In their early days, the pair would divide their time between songwriting and signing on. After their ska excursion with The Executive they were joined by Shirlie Holliman, Ridgeley's then-girlfriend, and the three of them would choreograph dance routines, which they'd perform at local nightclubs.

"It was so much fun," recalls Holliman. "The three of us got on brilliantly – they became my world. We'd all go dancing together, and Wham! started out as an extension of that. They were great times but I sometimes felt like a spare part next to George – his talent overawed me, and still does. He was the organiser, and Andrew had the charisma."

An obviously gifted musician, Michael took on the bulk of the songwriting duties. The duo wanted to be as big as possible in as short a time as possible,

and Ridgeley reasoned that allowing Michael to write the material was the way to achieve that. While Ridgeley's role in Wham! has been endlessly debated over the years, Simon Napier-Bell, who managed the band from 1983-86, insists that he was integral to their success.

"Andrew was the image," Napier-Bell explains. "Wham! was two lads around town – heterosexual and having fun. George invented the image of the band from observing Andrew. He then chose to act out the role of the second of the two lads around town. Sure, George wrote the songs, but songwriters can be hired or recruited. The one essential of any group is its personality, its image, and that was pure Andrew. Without him, Wham! could never have existed."

Inspired by the music they were hearing at clubs such as London's Le Beat Route – the likes of Chic, the Bee Gees and Earth, Wind & Fire – the pair decided to record a demo tape. They hired a Portastudio for £20 and recorded four of the tracks they'd written in Ridgeley's parents' living room. The tape was rejected by all of the major labels, but a chance meeting with an old friend in London's Three Crowns pub gave them their break.

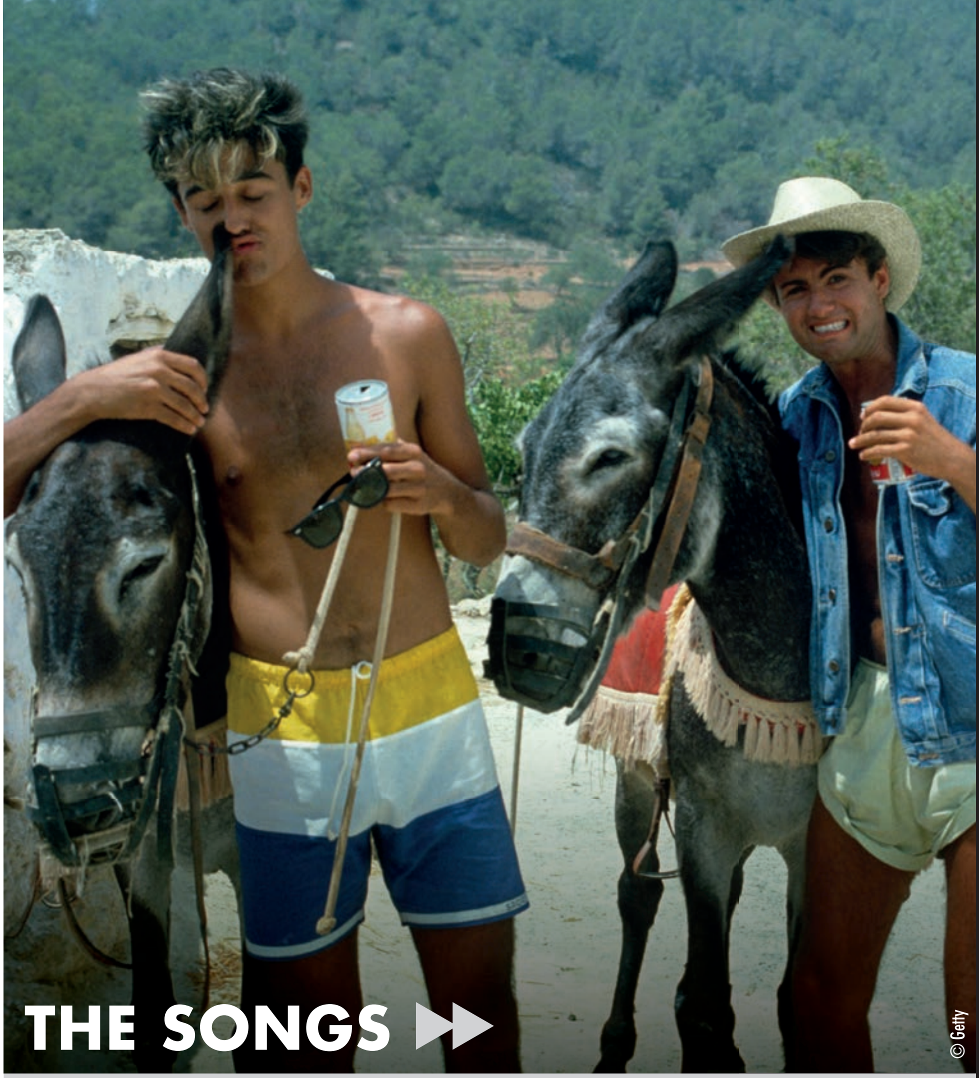
Mark Dean, a local music executive, had made a name for himself in A&R, having discovered Soft Cell and ABC. Now, having set up Innervision, he offered Wham! a deal, which Michael and Ridgeley – anxious that this would be their one chance at fame – accepted. They went straight into the studio to lay down the four tracks from their demo, as well as a solo composition from George called *Young Guns (Go For It!)*.

At this point, Michael, Ridgeley and Holliman were joined by a new backing singer/dancer, Dee C Lee. "I was working as an in-house session singer at EMI Publishing, recording maybe three or four tracks a day for the songwriters signed," she tells *Classic Pop*. "Someone from Innervision contacted EMI about a new boyband that wanted two female singers – one black and one white. I met them and we just clicked. They were really young and innocent, very sweet and great fun.

"Recording *Fantastic* was great – although I'd worked in studios before, this was a new experience for us all, and so exciting. George particularly had driving passion and ambition – and, of course, the songs were brilliant. I knew they were going to be huge."

Wham Rap! (Enjoy What You Do) was released as Wham!'s debut single in June 1982. A fusion of white pop and black soul music (a formula that would continue to inform the sound of George Michael's records throughout the rest of his career), and incorporating rap, at that time a new concept in music, the song became a big club hit. Many DJs believed the track to be the work of a hot new act from New York, until Wham! turned up to perform it.

Having built up a following from their days performing their dance routines in clubs, the band embarked on a gruelling PA tour of those clubs to promote *Wham Rap!*. The image of two pretty, bare-chested white boys in leather jackets and skin-tight



© Getty

THE SONGS ▶▶

❶ BAD BOYS
The third single from the album and the highest-charting Wham! song to date, *Bad Boys* was always singled out by George as his least favourite of his own songs. A statement of youthful independence, it portrays the turbulent relationship between a misunderstood son and his parents who disapprove of his partying lifestyle.

❷ A RAY OF SUNSHINE
Capturing the essence of music as medicine and how it can be used as a tool to elevate your mood, the aptly titled *A Ray Of Sunshine* is one of the strongest melodies on the record, drawing its inspiration from the disco and funk floorfillers from George and Andrew's favourite club, Le Beat Route.

❸ LOVE MACHINE
When covering songs, George always made a point of staying very true to the originals, arguing that he didn't want to lose what made the track so special to him in the first place. This cover of The Miracles' *Love Machine* saw George emulate each member of the band's vocal stylings from a deep growl to a flirty falsetto.

❹ WHAM RAP! (ENJOY WHAT YOU DO)
The duo's first single which flopped initially was inspired by Andrew singing along to The Sugarhill Gang's *Rapper's Delight* in a nightclub, changing the lyrics to what would inspire the refrain of this track-'Wham! Bam! I am the man!' A rallying cry to eschew the mundanity of normalcy in favour of having fun, it embodied the spirit of early Wham!.

❺ CLUB TROPICANA
A respite from the social commentary of hits such as *Young Guns* and *Wham Rap!* or the angst of *Bad Boys*, the uplifting, breezy Balearic bliss of *Club Tropicana* saw a major shift in the group's music and aesthetic. Frothy and fun, it captured the essence and abandon of the emerging Club 18-30 holidays.

❻ NOTHING LOOKS THE SAME IN THE LIGHT
An outlier on the album and a major indicator of the more mature direction George saw his songwriting heading in, ballad *Nothing Looks The Same In The Light* describes the harsh reality of life the morning after a thrilling night of no-strings sex. George later admitted that it was inspired by his first sexual encounter with a man.

❼ COME ON!
Throughout his career, George always wore his musical influences on his sleeve and *Come On!* is proof that it is something he did from the beginning. Drawing heavily from acts such as Chic and Earth Wind & Fire, the song is indebted to the latter's *Boogie Wonderland* with its groove, soulful stabs of brass and Philip Bailey-esque vocal runs.

❽ YOUNG GUNS (GO FOR IT!)
From Stringfellows to *Saturday Superstore*, they were spotted performing *Young Guns* at the celebrated celebrity haunt by a BBC booker who gave them their big break. An ode to not letting a partner come between a friendship, the rap-inspired track saw them crack the Top 10 for the first time.

THE VIDEOS ▶▶

WHAM RAP! (ENJOY WHAT YOU DO)
Escape from the domestic and the humdrum was the theme for Wham!'s first-ever promo video, with George pirouetting chirpily past early morning shoppers to liberate Andrew from his disapproving mum and dad. Cut to the chorus, where Ridgeley too dons a symbolic leather jacket and the pair join Dee and Shirlie for some synchronised moves.

YOUNG GUNS (GO FOR IT!)
Wham!'s teen-mag world cannily moves from living room to nightclub, where Andrew plays the put-upon bridegroom-in-waiting, Shirlie his possessive fiancée and George the spreader of the single-life gospel, all intercut with flashbacks of the boys frolicking in the West End (with Andrew puking in a bin). He must choose: married life, or more laddish good times? Woo! George wins!

BAD BOYS
More rite-of-passage rebellion, this time fronted by a sepia-tinged filmette of a wartime family with a catapult-wielding little boy who grows to a teen and has it out with his so-conventional parents. Cue American cars, more macho studded garb and stylish dance moves amongst clouds of dry ice. Great fun, but all a bit predictable…

CLUB TROPICANA
Filmed mostly at the infamous Pikes Hotel in Ibiza, later the scene of Freddie Mercury's beyond-hedonistic 41st birthday party, *Club Tropicana* was much more the (airline) ticket, with Dee, Shirlie, George and Andrew playing out a sexy and cocktail-soaked Balearic holiday flirtation, with that neat identity reveal towards the end.

Andrew, Dee, Shirlie and George in Ibiza for the filming of the *Club Tropicana* video

© Photoshot

jeans indulging in flirty dancing with Lee and Holliman went down a storm.

"Those club tours were extremely hard work – sometimes, five or six shows a night – but we enjoyed all of it," Lee recalls. "As it was a new and fresh experience, it didn't really feel like work. We were always surprised by the fantastic reaction from the audiences, and became more confident with every show."

"Those PAs were the best practice in the world," George later said. "They were awful and amateur, but we had to do them; there was no way we could make those dance routines up in my mum's living room and expect them to translate straight away onto live television."

Although they prepared the band for performing in front of live audiences, the PAs failed to translate into sales and *Wham Rap! (Enjoy What You Do)* peaked at No.105 in the UK. Wham! were still perceived as a club act, and needed to transcend that. Ironically, it was while performing their second single, *Young Guns (Go For It!)*, at one of London's most celebrated clubs that they got the opportunity to do that.

"Someone from the BBC spotted us in Stringfellows and invited us onto *Saturday Superstore*," says Holliman. "It all escalated from there. I went shopping in Watford with George after the programme had finished, and people were staring and pointing at us."

Wham! were back at the BBC when an act pulled out of *Top Of The Pops* at the last minute. Despite *Young Guns* languishing outside the UK Top 40, the group were booked on the basis of the positive reaction to their *Saturday Superstore* performance. This proved to be a career-defining moment and within weeks, *Young Guns*, a joyous ode to single life, made it into the UK Top 5 – their first hit.

A hasty re-release of *Wham Rap! (Enjoy What You Do)* followed it into the Top 10, peaking at No.8 in February 1983. With the pressure on, Michael delivered *Bad Boys*, a tale of teen rebellion that hit No.2 in the UK, though the songwriter admits it was his creative nadir. "I wrote to a formula for *Bad Boys*, trying to replicate something else," he sighs. "That's something I'd never done before and have never done since."

George's disappointment with *Bad Boys* was compounded by the frustration he was experiencing with Innervision's miserly hand-outs. They enlisted Nomis Management, a company set up by newcomer Jazz Summers and industry veteran Simon Napier-Bell (who'd previously managed Marc Bolan and Japan), to help release them from their contract. "I was confident that we could get them out of it," remembers Napier-Bell. "Contracts as bad as that can't stand up in British courts. But it wasn't easy – money was needed to fight it, and they didn't have any. And we were up against CBS, who had more money than any other record company in the world."

"RECORDING *FANTASTIC* WAS GREAT – A NEW EXPERIENCE FOR US ALL AND SO EXCITING. GEORGE PARTICULARLY HAD DRIVING PASSION AND AMBITION – AND, OF COURSE, THE SONGS WERE BRILLIANT. I KNEW THEY WERE GOING TO BE HUGE." **DEE C LEE**

Wham!'s next single, *Club Tropicana*, marked a number of departures. The angsty social commentary of the first three singles was replaced with a fun, breezy tale of sun, sea and sand, with its now-iconic video – casting the duo as airline pilots living it up – marking the end of their 'baby biker' image. Another departure was Dee C Lee. "I didn't want to just dance and look good, and I had all these ideas in my head," she tells us. "I was offered a solo deal by CBS and I'd already been working with The Style Council, who encouraged me to be creative and experiment with my voice. So I made solo records and joined The Style Council full-time." Pepsi DeMacque joined Wham! as her replacement.

Wham! released the *Fantastic* album on 9 July 1983. A cohesive collection of frothy, feel-good funk, it received mixed reviews but was a smash, going straight to No.1 in the UK and spending 113 weeks in the Top 100. The album consisted of the singles, a reprise of *Come On!* from their original demo, two new songs (*A Ray Of Sunshine* and *Nothing Looks The Same In The Light*) and a cover of The Miracles' *Love Machine*. *Careless Whisper* failed to make the cut: "It didn't fit in, either song-wise or image-wise," explains Napier-Bell. "And I think George thought it might be something he'd use later to launch a solo career."

Due to legal wrangles, Wham! found themselves in limbo, unable to record or release any new material. Napier-Bell booked the band on a UK tour to retain their profile and raise funds to fight their impending court battle with Innervision. The 32-date Club Fantastic tour was a huge success; every show was a sell-out and 'Whamania' hit the headlines, with thousands of fans besieging the group's every move – and George and Andrew's faces (and bodies) beginning to appear in teen mags and tabloids.

"The tour was chaos," says Holliman. "All these fans wanting to get in with George and Andrew. They'd ask Pepsi and I to pass on messages for them, with phone numbers and underwear attached. But it didn't work!"

Wham! in 1984 – *Make It Big* made the top spot on the US Billboard going six times Platinum

CLASSIC ALBUM

MAKE IT BIG
WHAM!

DITCHING THE BABY BIKER IMAGE OF THEIR DEBUT ALBUM, WHAM! EMBRACED A POPPIER SOUND WHICH COST THEM CREDIBILITY BUT MADE THEM ONE OF THE DECADE'S BIGGEST SUCCESS STORIES…

MARK LINDORES

As the curtain came down on the Club Fantastic Tour in November 1983, it also brought an end to the first chapter in Wham!'s success story. Having discarded their leather jackets and 'baby biker' image, the subversive street kids unwilling to be part of the system traded the attitude for the breezy fun and sunshine of fourth single *Club Tropicana*. The switch-up had proved to be the perfect fit for them and defined their future direction. The future of Wham! was bright.

However, locked in litigation hell with their record label Innervision, they faced a fraught and lengthy battle to free themselves of a contract which they regarded as little more than professional slavery (a term which would rear its head again much later in George's career). Infuriatingly for the band, who were forced into silence as the legal battles ensued, the label continued to cash-in by releasing the *Club Fantastic Megamix* (comprising the singles from the 1983 *Fantastic* album).

The situation only worsened when Innervision revealed plans to release *Careless Whisper* next, an unreleased song George had recorded in 1983 in the legendary Muscle Shoals studio with producer Jerry Wexler. Unhappy with the mix, he planned to re-record it to release later in his career, confident that it was a No.1 hit. Publisher Dick Leahy's intervention prevented the label from releasing the song on the basis that it was unreleased work and George had the right to first license a tune he owned the copyright of. As the megamix had contained three previously released singles, the label had taken advantage of a loophole and released it without the artist's permission.

"I JUST WANTED TO MAKE A REALLY ENERGETIC POP RECORD THAT HAD ALL THE BEST ELEMENTS OF 50S AND 60S RECORDS, COMBINED WITH OUR ATTITUDE AND OUR APPROACH – MORE UPTEMPO AND A LOT YOUNGER THAN SOME OF THOSE RECORDS"
GEORGE MICHAEL

Although Wham!'s management were battling to resolve the issue on their behalf, the stress naturally weighed heavy on George and Andrew, uncertain and concerned for their future. These worries presented themselves as a serious case of writer's block. The downtime during court proceedings had been allotted for Wham! to ready new material in order to minimise their time out of the spotlight, but George found it increasingly difficult to come up with anything due to a preoccupation with the group's predicament. In February of 1984, a brief burst of creativity resulted in *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go*, a sugar-coated throwback of a tune, which incorporated everything from doo-wop to rock'n'roll to classic Motown.

"I just wanted to make a really energetic pop record that had all the best elements of 50s and 60s records, combined with our attitude and our approach, which is obviously more uptempo and a lot younger than some of those records," George told *Rolling Stone*. "It's one of those tracks that gets rid of a lot of your own personal influences; it reminds me of so many different records that I couldn't actually nail them down. I'd done a demo at home that just had a bass line and a vocal on it. Usually, I write the record in my head; I know what all the parts are going to be, and I sing them to all our musicians. And it was great."

Within months, the dispute with their former label was resolved and Wham!, now signed to Epic Records, were free to officially kick off the next chapter of their career with the release of *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go* on 14 May 1984. Any worries the boys had that their time out of the limelight would have ruined the momentum they were gaining were swiftly allayed by the success of the single, their first UK No.1 hit. The irresistibly catchy track, teamed with a video which affirmed their fun-loving, squeaky-clean image proved the perfect pop package. While many of their peers were imploding or exploring more political themes in their music, Wham! was a Day-Glo-drenched teenage dream, brimming with positivity, right down to their Katharine Hamnett 'Choose Life' slogan T-shirts.

Although obviously overjoyed at the success – performing a chart-topping single on *Top Of The Pops* had always been the ultimate goal – the single stirred mixed feelings for George. Not only was he trapped in a carefully curated public image of teen heartthrob, the success of the song compounded the pressure to repeat its success.

In the summer of 1984, the band (George and Andrew, Pepsi & Shirlie, plus bass player Deon Estus, keyboardist Tommy Eyre, drummer Trevor Murrell and trumpeter Paul Spong among others) headed to the infamous Studio Miraval in the South of France in the hopes that a change of scenery would ignite creativity (not to mention avoid a hefty tax

"I HAD BEEN WORKING VERY HARD AND I KNEW I NEEDED TO SIT BACK AND COLLECT MY THOUGHTS… SO THAT I COULD WRITE THE SECOND ALBUM. I NEEDED THAT BREATHING SPACE." GEORGE MICHAEL

THE VIDEOS ▶▶

WAKE ME UP BEFORE YOU GO-GO
Explaining that *Make It Big* had no cohesion, George once said that the only common thread running through the record was "the image – which was consistently naff". The *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go* video was Wham!'s nadir as far as he was concerned (along with *Bad Boys*). Shot at London's Brixton Academy, the expected turnout for the audience fell way short due to a rainstorm and careful camera work was required to give the illusion of screaming hordes! The video includes a symbolic transition from Wham!'s sportswear styling to a more refined look with the Katharine Hamnett-designed 'Choose Life' T-shirt.

CARELESS WHISPER
Filmed in Miami, playboy George portrays the remorseful philanderer of the lyric, realising he has screwed up his chance at happiness. The promo famously went over budget as George had to fly his personal hairdresser over to Miami after the humidity turned his hair into an uncontrollable mane! As if that inconvenience and expense wasn't bad enough, the clip was filmed to an early recording of the track and the lip-syncing in the video didn't match the finalised audio track. Instead of shelving and re-shooting the entire thing, George filmed another performance in London's Lyceum which was then intercut with the salvageable footage from the Miami shoot.

FREEDOM
Unusually, *Freedom* was released without a promo video, with the boys doing the rounds of music shows such as *Top Of The Pops* and *Razzmatazz* to perform the song rather than rely on a video to promote it. However, by the time *Freedom* was released in America in 1985, MTV was the biggest promotional opportunity there was and no video put them at a big disadvantage of scoring a hit. Also, Wham! were on tour at the time and couldn't promote it personally, so a video was put together using some of the footage they had shot for a documentary they were making about their landmark tour of China, *Foreign Skies*.

EVERYTHING SHE WANTS
After camping it up in the Swiss Alps for the *Last Christmas* video, the song's double A-side, *Everything She Wants*, could not have been given a more different treatment. With *Everything She Wants* being pushed as the main single post-Christmas, a slick video was filmed. Shot entirely in black and white (as would all Wham! videos from this point), *Everything She Wants* was a straightforward performance promo. The clip focused on a close-up of George performing the track intercut with footage designed to capture the excitement of the Wham! live experience shot across the UK during The Big Tour.

bill). They had worked non-stop throughout a whirlwind two years and endured the stress of their court case against Innervision. The trip to the peace and tranquillity of the French countryside was intended to give them not only focus, but an opportunity to recharge their batteries.

"That break turned out to be a really positive thing," George wrote in his autobiography *Bare*. "I had been working very hard and I knew I needed to sit back and collect my thoughts, as a person and creatively, so that I could write the second album. I needed that breathing space."

What had started out as a jovial, relaxed atmosphere quickly changed into a tense environment as George was consumed by the pressure to deliver a solid second album. New label Epic was aware of how fickle the music industry could be and made it abundantly clear that they were keen to progress with the group as quickly as possible on the back of *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go's* immense popularity. With plans to position Wham! as a global sensation on the scale of Duran Duran and Culture Club, they wanted a follow-up single imminently and had scheduled the album's release before the end of the year, anticipating it would be one of 1984's big festive sellers.

While their legal battle against their former label had strengthened their partnership, cracks began to appear when Andrew's party lifestyle threatened to spiral out of control. Already under immense pressure from Epic, George's expectations of himself also placed him under great strain. Having taken on full artistic control of Wham!, including writing and producing all of their music himself, Andrew's constant partying and laid-back approach began to get to George.

Looming record company deadlines took their toll on him mentally and he became increasingly irritable – particularly when Andrew and some of the others were essentially using the break as an extended holiday by inviting friends to visit and generally living the superstar lifestyle without, it seemed, putting in the work. The final straw came when a TV crew arrived to film a short documentary for *The Tube*. As they waited to interview George and Andrew, the latter was being bathed by his friends to wake him up as he'd got so drunk he was unable to do so himself. Suitably recovered and able to be his cocky, charming self once the cameras were rolling, Andrew was warned to get his act together after the interview by George who was beginning to feel taken advantage of.

Once the purpose of the trip had been reiterated to everyone, Wham!'s Gallic getaway proved to be a fruitful trip. The booming sound system and crates of Motown and classic soul records on constant rotation now served as inspiration rather than entertainment. Certified soul boy George absorbed the slick harmonies and addictive melodies and fused them with his own pop sensibilities. As both George and Andrew were already aware at this point that Wham! had a shelf life – the brand was built on a carefully curated image of youth and vibrancy – it was important that the second album moved in a slightly more mature direction

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brass salvo and soulful vocal is a superb take on tracks such as Stevie Wonder's *Uptight*. Obviously proud of the song, George later revisited *Freedom* by including a church organ rendition of the chorus as the intro to *Faith*.

THE SONGS

1 WAKE ME UP BEFORE YOU GO-GO
Make It Big's opening number was famously inspired by a note Andrew left instructing George to wake him. Realising he had written "up" twice, Ridgeley added an extra "go" as a joke. As well as being sonically retro, the lyrics directly reference the past. Namechecking Doris Day and using terminology such as "jitterbug" is practically branding the song as a throwback to the squeaky-clean teenage dreams of the 1950s rock'n'roll era.

2 EVERYTHING SHE WANTS
The final track written for the album and George's personal favourite from the Wham! catalogue, *Everything She Wants* was the first time he wrote a song having the music first. Inspired by the Linn drum and groove, he composed a lyric about being trapped in an unhappy marriage. The song is unusual in the sense that its chorus is a series of vocal riffs and has no lyrics. Released as a double A-side with *Last Christmas*, until 2011 it held the record for the biggest-selling single to miss the top spot due to Band Aid's *Do They Know It's Christmas?* taking the prestigious Christmas No.1 placing that year.

3 HEARTBEAT
Opening with a riff reminiscent of Lindisfarne's 1978 hit *Run For Home* which is repeated throughout, *Heartbeat* takes its inspiration from Phil Spector's 'Wall Of Sound' production style of the 60s and could have been sung by any of the classic girl groups before a guitar solo evokes the 50s once more. In the spirit of much great pop music, its upbeat melody masks a feeling of melancholia, delivered by a superb vocal from George.

4 LIKE A BABY
Probably the weakest point of the album, *Like A Baby* is a precursor to the mature balladry that George would excel at as his solo career progressed. The song's melody is easily forgettable and, with no vocal for almost two minutes, borders on meandering. A mastered version of hidden gem *Blue (Armed With Love)*, an early take of which appeared on the B-side of *Club Tropicana*, should have taken this spot on the album.

5 FREEDOM
There is no doubt that Motown was the prevalent influence on George during this period. He, like many others, regarded the sound of 60s Detroit the ultimate pop music. *Freedom* is the song that carries that flavour more than any other. A bombastic pastiche, its stomping beat, jubilant brass salvo and soulful vocal is a superb take on tracks such as Stevie Wonder's *Uptight*. Obviously proud of the song, George later revisited *Freedom* by including a church organ rendition of the chorus as the intro to *Faith*.

6 IF YOU WERE THERE
Another big inspiration during the *Make It Big* album sessions in France was The Isley Brothers. The group's music was played a lot as George attempted to recreate their sound for a song. After various attempts, he failed to come up with anything and decided to just cover this track, his favourite, as a tribute to the group. Deeming the song almost perfect, he wanted the Wham! version to remain as faithful to the original as possible. The track showcased him as a great soul singer. Although *If You Were There* was never made a single, George's fondness for the song became obvious when it was included on a 1997 greatest hits collection which also took its name.

7 CREDIT CARD BABY
A sonic sibling to *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go*, *Credit Card Baby* is *Make It Big*'s poppiest moment. Once again recalling the sounds of Motown, the song treads similar lyrical ground to *Everything She Wants*, examining the role of materialism in a relationship. Rumoured at the time to be about a girlfriend that was interested in George's wealth and celebrity status, it is widely believed to be an early example of him inhabiting a character, in this case a wealthy playboy, and singing from that perspective. *Credit Card Baby*'s infectious melody would have guaranteed another chart-topper had it been released as a single.

8 CARELESS WHISPER
One of the very first songs written by George and Andrew, this now classic ballad began life in 1981 as *Guilty Feet*. It was rearranged and re-recorded several times before arriving at the final mix. One of the most difficult parts to get right was the signature sax solo, which George agonised over. It was only when session saxophonist Steve Gregory, best known for playing on The Rolling Stones' *Honky Tonk Women*, was brought in at the eleventh hour and played it perfectly that the song was complete. A song about the guilt and torment of an adulterous lover, it is inconceivable that a relatively inexperienced teenager could pen lyrics of such maturity.

that would provide a stepping stone to the oeuvre that George wanted to move into with his eventual solo music.

By the end of the six-week sojourn, the album was almost finished. En route back home, George stopped off in Paris to record *Everything She Wants*, which completed the album. Once back in London, he headed into the studio to record *Last Christmas*, a song he'd penned a year previously. Although it was never intended to be on the album, the remainder of the year was packed with a hectic promo schedule and sold-out tour, so all the recording was completed during the summer. At just eight tracks, it was a concise set which relied heavily on retro-sounding pop, sensual balladry and funky synth-pop. Lyrically, the songs rarely strayed from the safe, relatable complexities of relationships.

Keen to show the versatility of his songwriting, George suggested *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go's* follow-up should be something completely different and the decision was made to release *Careless Whisper*. The moody ballad, with its instantly recognisable sax hook, was a marked contrast to its predecessor. Released as George's debut solo single (it was released as 'Wham! Featuring George Michael' in the US), the song revealed him as capable of producing material with a maturity which belied his 21 years. The release of *Freedom* in October 1984 became George's third No.1 single of the year, a stat which practically guaranteed the album would be a success when it followed weeks later on 5 November.

As expected, Wham! had pre-empted their career trajectory with the album's title. *Make It Big* topped the album charts internationally and went on to sell over 10 million copies. The pinnacle of Wham!'s success, it propelled them to a level of fame in which the music became almost irrelevant (much to the chagrin of George who always wanted his work to be recognised foremost). Like The Beatles before them, Wham! had reached a level where they weren't listened to, they were screamed at. As one of the biggest bands in the world, they had made it bigger than they had ever anticipated. ■

Dynamic duo: Andrew Ridgeley and George Michael at the photoshoot for what became the front cover for 1984's *Make It Big* album

© Tony McGee

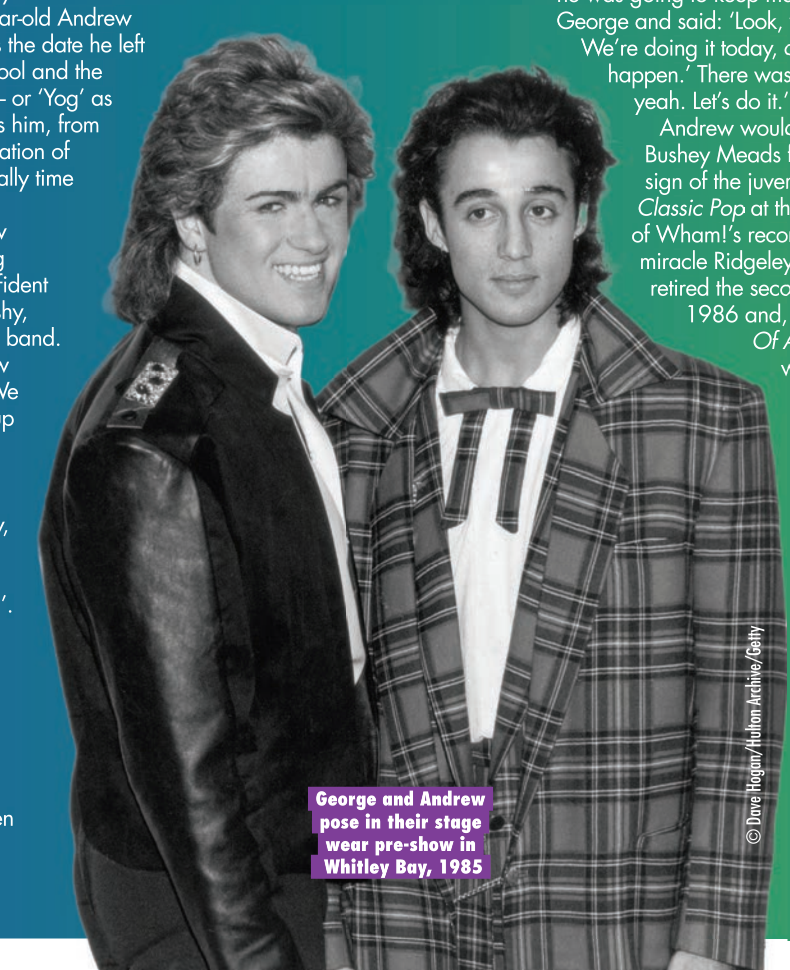
"WHAM! WAS OUR FRIENDSHIP SET TO MUSIC"

FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE GEORGE MICHAEL AND ANDREW RIDGELEY PROFESSIONALLY PARTED COMPANY IN 1986, A MAJOR WHAM! REISSUE ARRIVED IN 2023, WITH A SINGLES COMPILATION AND 7" BOXSET. IT COINCIDED WITH THE FIRST OFFICIAL WHAM! DOCUMENTARY, MADE BY NETFLIX. IN THIS RARE ARCHIVE INTERVIEW, ANDREW SHARES HIS MEMORIES OF THE EARLY DAYS WITH GEORGE AND POP STARDOM, WHILE PEPSI & SHIRLIE DISCUSS THEIR PART IN WHAM!'S ALL TOO BRIEF HEYDAY.

JOHN EARLS

Forget about Bonfire Night: 5 November 1979 was an explosive day in music history and for the career prospects of 16-year-old Andrew Ridgeley. That was the date he left Bushey Meads secondary school and the day he and George Michael – or 'Yog' as Andrew still affectionately calls him, from the phonetic 'Yoghir' pronunciation of Georgios – decided it was finally time to form a band together.

Pop historians already know Ridgeley was the initial driving force behind Wham!, the confident teenager who persuaded his shy, awkward best mate to be in a band. It's a genesis story that Andrew recalls clearly, reminiscing: "We were 14 when I first brought up the idea of forming a band. Yog said he needed to get his O-Levels out of the way first. November 5th was a Monday, a few weeks into our A-Levels. At breaktime, I told our form tutor: 'Look, I'm leaving school'. She said: 'That's just as well, as we were going to ask you to leave'. I was pleased – I'd got in first! I phoned a nearby college, Cassio, and got an interview to go there instead. It made me realise it was now or never to form a band. When I'd raised the idea with Yog after O-Levels, he said: 'Well, er... It'll have to be after my A-Levels.' I thought he was going to keep making excuses. I phoned George and said: 'Look, we're forming a band *today*. We're doing it today, otherwise it's never going to happen.' There was a pause and Yog said: 'OK, yeah. Let's do it.'"


George and Andrew pose in their stage wear pre-show in Whitley Bay, 1985

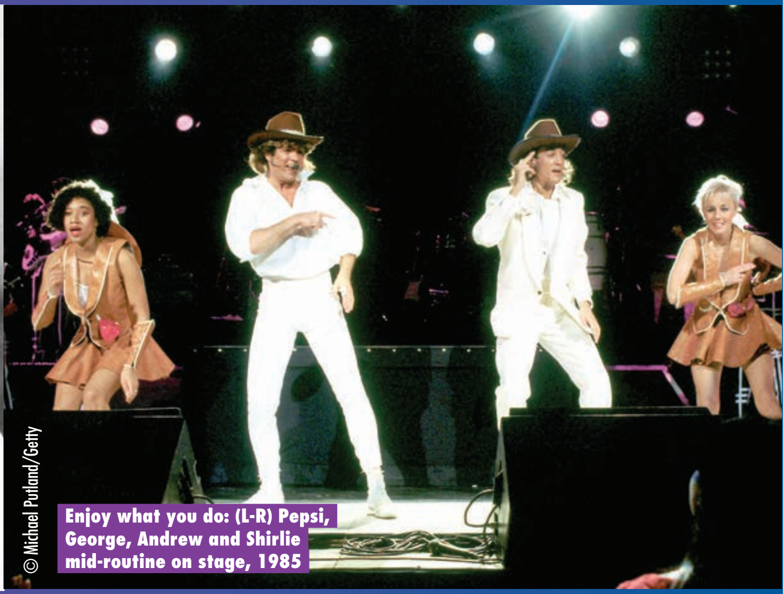
© Dave Hogan/Hulton Archive/Getty

Andrew would have been expelled from Bushey Meads for truancy, but there's no sign of the juvenile delinquent as he greets *Classic Pop* at the King's Cross headquarters of Wham!'s record label, Sony. It's a minor miracle Ridgeley is being interviewed: he retired the second that Wham! finished in 1986 and, barring his solo album *Son Of Albert* , released in 1990, was barely heard from until his 2019 memoir, *Wham! George & Me*.

Still, for a former recluse, Andrew Ridgeley is quite the talker. A keen cyclist and surfer, he's in extraordinarily good shape: more pop stars should sack it all off, if the quiet life means they look as trim as Ridgeley in his navy zip-up fleece. He's as relaxed as he seemed in early Wham! interviews, quick to laugh, only pausing to pick an exact word: his mum Jenny was an English teacher, after all.

Fun and sunshine: Filming the *Club Tropicana* video at Pikes Hotel in Ibiza, 1983

© Getty



Enjoy what you do: (L-R) Pepsi, George, Andrew and Shirlie mid-routine on stage, 1985

© Michael Putland/Getty

The reception to that autobiography made Andrew reassess his attitude to Wham!'s legacy. "Meeting the fans at signings was a very nice experience indeed," he grins. "The palpable affection and goodwill that people hold Wham! in, right through the age groups, was remarkable for me.

"Some amazing stories were recounted to me. One lady had flown in from Kabul. Her brother had *Fantastic* on cassette in Afghanistan, where music was banned under the Taliban. In the early 80s, that cassette went around their village. It was a remarkable example of how deep and strong the effect of music can have in shaping people's lives."

"GEORGE WAS FINDING HIS WAY IN LIFE DURING WHAM!, WHEREAS ANDREW WAS FULL OF LIFE AND READY FOR SHOWTIME"
PEPSI DEMACQUE-CROCKETT

BUILDING THE LEGACY

Now personally aware of Wham!'s importance, and with the 40th anniversary of *Fantastic* looming, Ridgeley and George's estate decided it was time for both a singles compilation and a Netflix documentary so that: "We could build a legacy, which would do justice to Wham! and everything it achieved."

The resulting film, *Wham! The Biography* by Fyre Festival documentary director Chris Smith, is excellent: evocative footage, overlaid with George and Andrew the only voices heard. It's compelling in highlighting the intensity of 80s pop stardom, outdated attitudes to sexuality and just how short a time the Wham! comet was in orbit. Equally importantly, you're reminded of how downright hilarious George Michael was.

"Comedy and music were the pillars on which our friendship was based," notes Ridgeley. "We went to see the Monty Python films *The Life Of Brian* and *The Meaning Of Life* at the cinema together. The Mr Creosote scene in *The Meaning Of Life* was so funny, I really did fall off my chair laughing.

"Our shared sense of humour was extremely juvenile. We were puerile and smutty. We stayed that way. Our sense of humour didn't mature in the least.

"In Wham!, we did some shockingly juvenile things. We went through a period where, whenever we met people – especially music executives – when their hands went out to shake, we'd withdraw and..." Andrew mimes the age-old joke of putting his hand to his nose and waggling it. "So puerile! But also deeply amusing. We were just taking the rise out of the whole situation we found ourselves in, which we did a lot. We took making music seriously, but we didn't take anything else seriously."

That camaraderie was an essential part of Wham!'s appeal. Two days after meeting Ridgeley, *Classic Pop* quizzes Pepsi & Shirlie over Zoom about their thoughts on the group. "The story of Wham! is the story of George and Andrew's friendship,"

"We took making music seriously, but we didn't take anything else seriously" – Andrew Ridgeley

© Getty

LAUGHS CHRISTMAS

Andrew Ridgeley insists his and George Michael's pranks didn't stop them being professional making videos – but admits filming *Last Christmas* was chaotic.

"It was so much fun that I don't actually appear in the video's last scene," he smiles. "Too much fun had been had by then. A friend who appears in it had to borrow his dad's trousers. They were incredibly stretchy, and he kept making a stretching sound with them. It was just so stupid that I was in tears laughing at him. I laughed so much that my face bloated and got puffy. Andy Morahan, the director, told me: 'We can't shoot you like that. You'll have to sit this scene out.'"

"How Andy ever got a film out of that shoot is a miracle," laughs Shirlie. "We had snowball fights, so the continuity was out, as everyone's hair was so wet. George took a massive snowball in his eye. And the alcohol on the last night of filming was real."

"That was a lovely moment," grins Pepsi. "A lot of schnapps. It was the only time I went skiing, too." In 2020, 36 years after Band Aid kept it from the top, *Last Christmas* reached No.1 in the UK. "Like *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go*, we knew *Last Christmas* was a No.1 within the first three bars," says Andrew. "It was always a slight thorn in Yog's side that it never got to No.1. It's such a brilliantly crafted pop song: a little kitsch, but with such depth and emotional resonance. Yog would have been immensely proud when *Last Christmas* finally made No.1."

believes Shirlie. "I'm so pleased the documentary shows that. It shows what an integral part Andrew played, and what an inspiration he was to George."

Pepsi nods enthusiastically, continuing: "I hope people who gave Andrew such a hard time in Wham! will see the truth now. Without him, there never would have been Wham!. Andrew was a real support for George. George was finding his way in life during Wham!, whereas Andrew was full of life and ready for showtime. It's a lovely film."

As confident as Ridgeley was, there were scores of obstacles that could have prevented the duo finding their way. Their first band, The Specials-influenced The Executive, was formed with Andrew's older brother Paul on drums, plus their friends David Austin – later George's manager – and Andy Leaver on guitar. As Ridgeley points out: "Two guitarists and no bassist, with me rudimentarily on keyboards. The Executive consisted of everyone we knew who had instruments."

Their first gig was at a party at Andy's parents' house – "How his mum and dad let us do a gig, I don't know" – before a first public concert at Bushey & Oxhey Scout Hut. "We played to 16-year-olds who'd had a couple of snakebites," laughs Andrew. "I remember it as being absolutely riotous.

"The Executive had some good little tunes. Had we stuck together, it might have happened. We were starting to become less ska/reggae and more pop. You had me, Yog and Dave, who's a talented songwriter, too. I don't see why it couldn't have succeeded."

Instead, The Executive supported punk staples The Vibrators at Harrow Technical College. That worked, but then David claimed he'd booked a headline show at the venue. He hadn't. "There was a conflagration, as you can imagine," says Andrew wryly. "And that was the end of The Executive."

In the fallout, Paul and David joined other bands. Andy died of cancer aged just 21. "That was so very, very sad," sighs Ridgeley. "Andy died so quickly and so young." *Fantastic* is dedicated to Andy.

George auditioned for a band, too. "They were a soul/funk band," recalls Andrew. "I'm not sure what they were called, but two of their members went on to be in Imagination. It wasn't a genre Yog particularly liked, so we decided that we should start writing new songs ourselves instead."

Wham! Rap soon arrived, inspired by a chant of "Wham! Bam! I am the man!" that Andrew would perform while he, George and Shirlie were out clubbing. The pair moved onto *Club Tropicana* and *Careless Whisper*. Far from Ridgeley getting royalties for George's debut solo single from his mate's loyalty, the classic started from Andrew's guitar chords.

However, while *Wham! Rap* was complete, there was only "maybe half" of *Club Tropicana* and just the chorus and a verse of *Careless Whisper* ready on the demo that Wham! deluged record companies with.

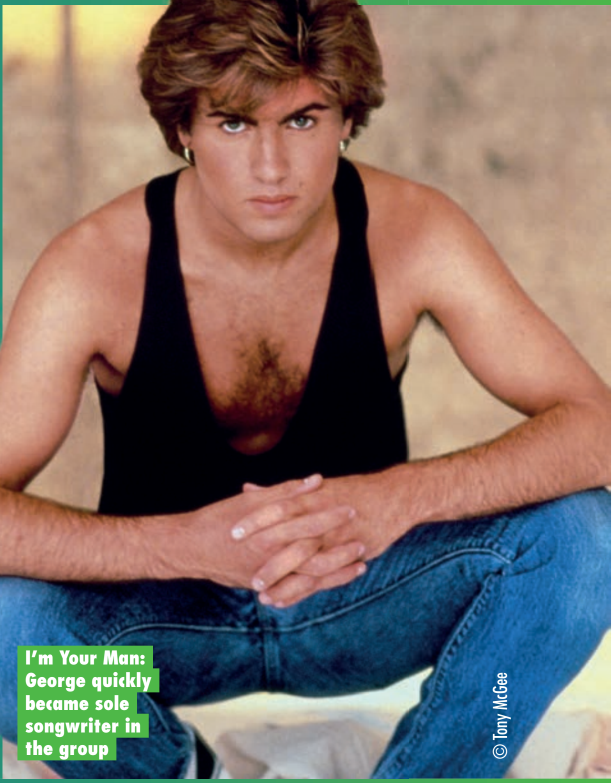
"I don't really know what possessed us to send out such an unfinished demo," acknowledges Ridgeley. "We were just so confident that those three songs were hits – and obviously we were right!"

Famously, the only person to spot Wham!'s potential was Mark Dean, a neighbour of Andrew's who'd signed Soft Cell and ABC to Universal. He was starting his own label, Innervision.

Wham!'s record deal was notoriously terrible, but Ridgeley is even-handed about Innervision's treatment. "Had we not signed Mark's deal, we wouldn't have been making records at all, I'm pretty sure of that," he shrugs. "Yog's dad got a lawyer to look over the contract first, but we were way down the list of his priorities, and none of us could believe how long he was taking.

"Mark gave us an ultimatum: sign the contract or lose the deal. I'm sure he meant it and he'd have moved onto the next act if we hadn't signed. It was the worst record deal ever signed: we didn't get paid for two years and didn't get paid on 12" singles at all. At least we were making records. But we expected to get paid for making those records, and that seemed to be a source of some confusion at Innervision."

Wham! Rap initially stalled at No.105 in the UK singles chart. What happened next made Andrew realise the scale of the talent of his best friend. "We needed a hit," he remembers. "We were demoing two other tracks, but they didn't have it. Then Yog pulled *Young Guns* out of the bag. It was different gravy, even when compared to *Wham! Rap*. That was the point that I realised Yog's songwriting was developing in leaps and bounds."



I'm Your Man: George quickly became sole songwriter in the group

© Tony McGee

Cool cat flash: Andrew on stage in Japan, 1985

© Getty

© Getty

George Michael in Sydney, 1985 – one year later he would make the break and begin his solo career

Excellent as it was, *Young Guns* was also struggling at UK No.42. Another artist – "Dave recently found out that it was probably Wah! Heat," reveals Ridgeley – cancelled their *Top Of The Pops* appearance at the very last minute, leaving BBC executives to relax rules that only Top 40 acts could appear. Wham! were ready... Sort of.

"*Top Of The Pops*' producer, Michael Hurll, oh my God!" splutters Andrew. "That show was his fiefdom, he was a proper little Napoleon. We'd been at the studio since seven in the sodding morning when we were berated for not performing ebulliently enough at one of the rehearsals. I told him: 'We've done this four times already!'

"By the time of the actual recording, I was bored and despised Michael Hurll so much that I let it get in the way of my performance. Thankfully, the girls and Yog were more than adequate compensation for my lack of brio."

Ridgeley's 40-year-old fury is a surprise to Shirlie, who laughs delightedly: "I loved it! I was more scared about how I looked than anything else, so I spent £60 on my Melissa Caplan dress, which was a fortnight's wages. You were bossed around on *Top Of The Pops*, but I wasn't disappointed at all."

Pepsi, who was still trying to become a session singer while future Style Council vocalist Dee C Lee was Shirlie's then-Wham! partner, tells her friend:

© Getty

CULTURE SHOCK

When Wham! became the first western band to play in China in April 1985, it was an incredible publicity stunt. But the 10-day tour was grounded in practicalities.

"The China trip was conceived to prevent our American tour being longer," reveals Andrew Ridgeley. "Yog had vocal polyps, which had to be carefully managed. We did around 30 dates for *Whamamerica!*, when normally bands would play 90 shows. That strain on Yog's voice could have precipitated it breaking down. The publicity of playing in China instead, that achieved what we wanted it to."

However, the reality of the country took its toll. "I found it overwhelming and confusing," admits Shirlie. "I don't like cruelty to animals. What I saw in China scarred me. I couldn't eat anything and lived on strawberry milkshakes."

"Shirlie was traumatised," adds Pepsi. "I was struggling, too, but was able to think: 'It's just a moment, it's going to end.' The good side of it were the firsts, in among the culture shocks. One of our guides had never had Coca-Cola. When we got some for him, it was like he was drinking the finest Champagne. But when we finally left China, we were all: 'Woah, that was heavy.'"

The tour at least continues to resonate, as Andrew smiles: "When I did signings for my book, one young chap handed me the dissertation he wrote at the London School Of Economics – it was on Wham! in China and the consequences of it."

"I remember that dress, it was lovely! I saw that Wham! performance and thought: 'A white girl with a black girl? Interesting, never seen that before.' But I assumed Wham! would only be around for a little while."

Young Guns promptly peaked at No.3, with one final hurdle facing Wham!: follow-up single *Bad Boys*. In the new film, George admits it was written to a formula and that it's his least favourite Wham! single by far, despite reaching No.2.

Andrew agrees, to a point: "It's a bloody good pop song with a great hook," he insists. "*Bad Boys* is a great dance track. If you rewrite the lyrics, Bob's your uncle. After the first two singles, we were again youth railing against the world. But *Bad Boys* is a less well enunciated take. *Wham! Rap* and *Young Guns* were both witty and tongue-in-cheek. *Bad Boys*? Yog would agree it's literally witless and it just lacks that humour. Yog hated the song, I hate the video more."

HITTING THE CLUB

It was time to finish *Club Tropicana* properly. "*Club Trop* was pure Wham!," smiles Andrew. "That allowed us to throw off the *Rebel Without A Cause* social conscience element the music press were keen for Wham! to represent. In one fell swoop, *Club Trop* reset Wham!'s image and artistic direction. Its tone was different and it liberated us to write more songs like that."

With *Fantastic* being assembled, the decision was made that George should take sole control of Wham!'s songwriting. Barely anyone in pop history is as good a songwriter as George Michael, but still: the three songs Andrew co-wrote were all big hits. So why stop? "Because we had a miles better songwriter in the room, it's as simple as that," responds Andrew. He's calm, explaining the decision as if it should be obvious. "Yog's songwriting was much better than mine. I genuinely felt he'd be able to shoulder those duties, so there was no point me trying to insist I should write, too.

"It was apparent that Yog could do it on his own. If I'd worked a little harder – or maybe at all – then things might have been different.

George and Michael enjoy the moment onstage in Sydney, January 1985

© Getty

"But I saw things very black-and-white and felt I couldn't write songs of the same quality as Yog.

"It was an easy decision. In fact, it was so easy, it wasn't even a decision at all. The reality was, there was only one way Wham! could go."

Despite recognising George's talent, Andrew admits the other three originals on *Fantastic* were "filler at best," adding: "*Ray Of Sunshine* has something to it, but I can't even remember *Come On*." Fair enough, but *Nothing Looks The Same In The Light* is beautiful, a classic early George Michael ballad. Andrew throws *Classic Pop* the kind of disappointed look you give someone who's just ordered omelette and chips in a Chinese restaurant. "You think? It's so dreary, not my cup of tea at all."

Fantastic flew to No.1, meaning it was time for Wham!'s first full tour. *Classic Pop* is deeply jealous of anyone who attended the *Club Fantastic* live shows. Indeed, Andrew's favourite forgotten moment unearthed for *Wham! The Biography* is from a short film shown after Gary Crowley's supporting DJ set, where Wham! go back to Bushey Meads to gently tease Ted Halliwell, their old headmaster.

"I loved that tour," enthuses Andrew. "I hadn't changed since we started The Executive. All I'd ever wanted was to write songs and perform them. All the rest of it was bullshit. That tour, all of Wham!'s tours, were what I was in a band for. That was good enough for me."

Andrew's onstage confidence chimed with Pepsi & Shirlie loving life as Wham!'s dancers and backing vocalists. "George and Andrew were the pilots, me and Pepsi were the passengers," believes Shirlie. "We were the girls next door. We weren't models, we were ordinary girls with extraordinary lives. That made us relatable. So many girls said they wanted to be Pepsi & Shirlie, but that was really so they could get near George and Andrew. We had a healthy view that Wham! wasn't about us two, it was all about the two boys."

"GEORGE AND ANDREW WERE THE PILOTS, ME AND PEPSI WERE THE PASSENGERS. WE WERE THE GIRLS NEXT DOOR."

SHIRLIE KEMP

"Ordinary girls with extraordinary lives" – Pepsi & Shirlie in 1988

© Getty

As the well-placed onlookers at blossoming megastardom, Pepsi & Shirlie's routines could also be relatably realistic, as Pepsi laughs: "We were taking everything in, so much so that I'd sometimes look at Shirl and realise her arms were dancing the other way to mine in a routine. In the show, we'd sometimes briefly walk offstage. Whenever I walked back onstage, it was like walking back into a fantasy."

Psychologically at least, the pair had a vital part to play, as Shirlie explains: "In the early days, I was a security blanket for George. He didn't have loads of confidence then. He'd sometimes literally grab hold of me for comfort during a show. He thought: 'I'm not ready to be up here on my own yet' and I felt we were his security."

SELF AWARENESS

George had disclosed his sexuality to Andrew and Shirlie during the filming of the *Club Tropicana* video. Unable to tell the wider world, he described the George Michael of Wham! as a "character" to display to the world while he was exploring his true self.

Ridgeley accepts he was fortunate to be able to be himself in Wham!, saying: "I'm pretty much as you see it. Wham! was a vehicle. Very early on, we understood that Wham! could only be temporary. For George to develop as a songwriter, he had to do it on his own, because Wham! was defined by the two of us. Essentially, Wham! was an expression of friendship made into music. That allowed George to write a certain style of song, which was limiting. Yog was the songwriter, but Wham! had parameters and constraints. That's why it could never be permanent."

Further constraints arrived when a nine-month dispute with Innervision prevented Wham! from recording, before signing to Sony. "Yog didn't write songs then," Andrew recalls. "The only new thing was *Whamshake*, a song that was close but just didn't have the wow factor. Then suddenly George came up with *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go*. That was several quantum leaps forward from anything else. The chorus came first. When Yog played me it, set to a LinnDrum beat, I was: 'Wow! *That* has the magic.'"

It was Wham!'s first UK No.1 single, followed by *Freedom*, *I'm Your Man* and *The Edge Of Heaven*. Ridgeley much prefers *Make It Big*'s songwriting, explaining: "We had carte blanche and weren't so narrowly defined. On *Make It Big*, the shackles were off and Yog went in any direction, with his voice the only defining factor.

"Yog rated his talents in descending order as songwriter, singer, producer. I'd rate him as singer, songwriter, producer, because his voice was just so powerful. He was an extraordinary singer who developed into an extraordinary songwriter. The essential magic in Yog's voice was always there, then he worked so hard at writing."

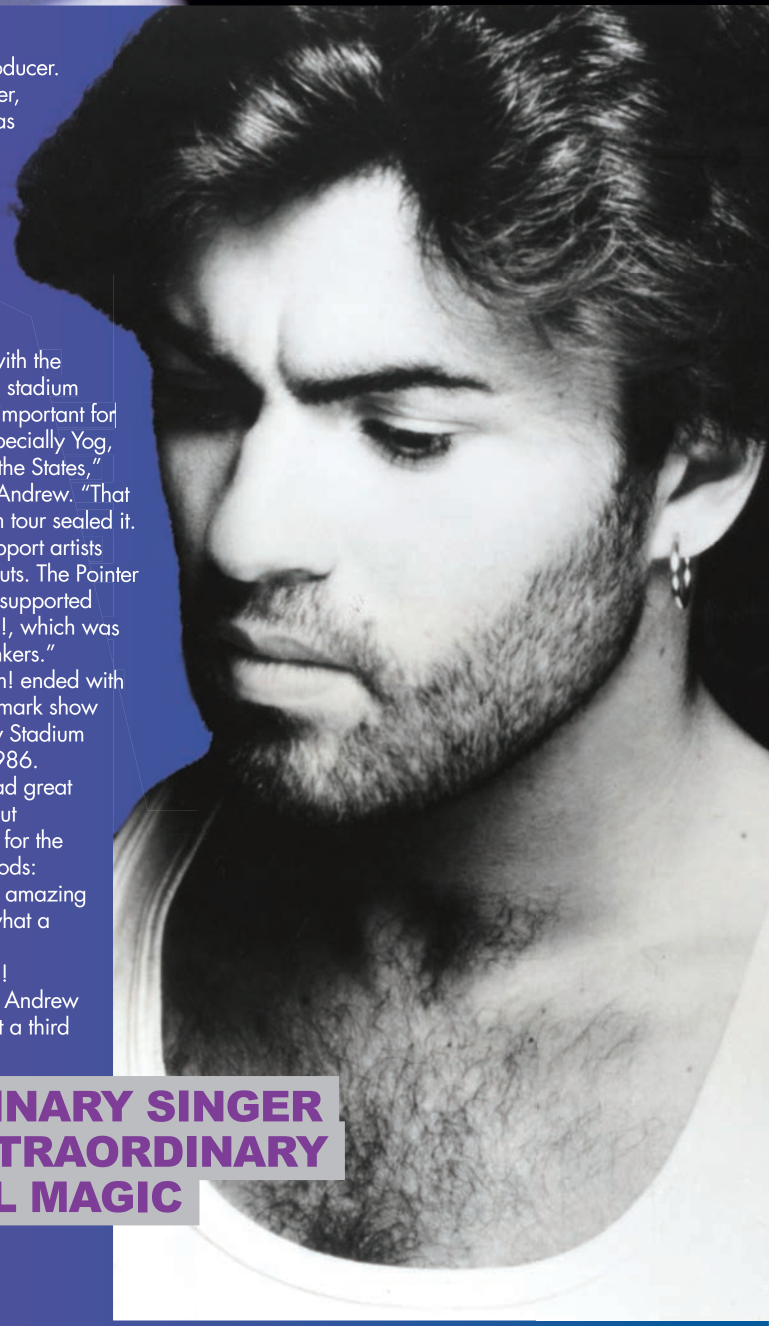
Make It Big saw Wham! conquer America, with the Whamamerica! stadium tour. "It was important for us, and especially Yog, to break the States," reflects Andrew. "That stadium tour sealed it. The support artists were nuts. The Pointer Sisters supported Wham!, which was just bonkers."

Wham! ended with their landmark show at Wembley Stadium on 28 June 1986. "The four of us had great moments in Wham!, but Wembley was a great moment for the fans," smiles Pepsi, as Shirlie nods: "You only appreciate now how amazing that show was. I'm in awe of what a great gig Wembley was."

While everyone says Wham! ended at exactly the right time, Andrew discloses George "talked about a third

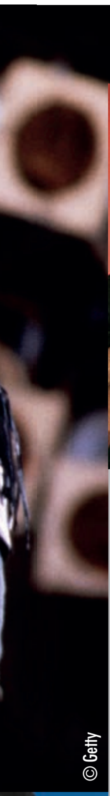
Gaining closure: Andrew and George in full flow at The Final concert at Wembley in June 1986

Club Fantastic: Pepsi & Shirlie



"GEORGE WAS AN EXTRAORDINARY SINGER WHO DEVELOPED INTO AN EXTRAORDINARY SONGWRITER. THE ESSENTIAL MAGIC WAS ALWAYS THERE."

ANDREW RIDGELEY



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EVERYTHING WE WANT

The new singles boxset raises the question of what else could come from Wham!'s back catalogue. Unreleased songs *Soul Boy* and *Whamshake* are known about – but Andrew Ridgeley doubts that they'll ever emerge.

"*Whamshake* just didn't have it," he smiles. "It didn't have it then, so I very much doubt it would have it now. *Soul Boy* and the other unreleased song we had before *Young Guns*, they could have become fillers on *Fantastic*, but we didn't develop them beyond demos.

"As a music fan, I know songs like that are gold dust and why people want to hear them, but it won't happen. Yog only wanted to present the gems – everything else he did wasn't for public consumption. It's why he was far from prolific.

"So, working with George's estate, Dave Austin and I are very cautious about anything like unreleased music. There are limited options with what we could do with Wham!, because you have to be very careful not to dilute the potency and value of our songs. It's a very sensitive subject."

That means the infamous widely bootlegged electro version of *Wham! Rap* remixed by Francois Kervorkian is unlikely ever to officially emerge, too. But Andrew is open to a Wham! live album happening one day, revealing: "I'd hope at some point that we might be able to release a live album. That's certainly a possibility."

© Getty

Andrew Ridgeley at The George Michael Collection VIP Reception at Christies in London, 2019

Wham! album." He reveals: "I'm not sure I'd have wanted to jump through the same hoops for another year by that point. Our profile had become Premier League and it wasn't something I'd got into music for.

"It was an intrusion that I wasn't prepared to have, so I was quite content to step away."

How similar would Wham! Three have sounded to *Faith*? "The title track could quite easily have been a Wham! song, so could one or two others on that album."

Promoting *Make It Big* on BBC1's *Wogan*, Ridgeley was asked what he wanted to do next. Presciently, he replies: "I'd like to retire with grace." George, Andrew, Pepsi and Shirlie remained friends, having occasional informal Wham! reunions at George's house. But Andrew kept his promise. "I never had any ambition to have a career in music like Yog," he explains. "I only ever wanted to be in a band with Yog and that was it. I obviously achieved that ambition and genuinely had no aspirations beyond that. Maybe that was the wrong decision, but I couldn't see myself making music with anyone else. It's not within me."

Tantalisingly, Ridgeley remixed *Club Tropicana* last year with TV/film composer Dru Masters. Is he about to make more music? "Never say never," he says, in a tone that suggests "Actually, you can say never." Is there anything further to come from Wham!? "Maybe there could be a Wham! hologram show like Abba's," ponders Shirlie. "That'd be amazing!" gasps Pepsi. "Our routines would evolve into being really slick. Those holograms? They would be really on it."

"I only ever wanted to be in a band with Yog and that was it" – Andrew Ridgeley

© alamy

● Wham!'s compilation *The Singles: Echoes From The Edge Of Heaven* was released on 7 July last year. *Wham! The Biography* is on Netflix now. Pepsi DeMacque-Crockett's debut novel *The Promise* is published by HarperFiction in spring 2024.

CAREELESS WHISPER

MAKE IT BIGGER

AS GEORGE AND ANDREW CAME OF AGE AND OUTGREW THEIR WHAM! PERSONAS, GEORGE WAS SOON READY TO EXPAND HIS MUSICAL HORIZONS – AND ONE SONG IN PARTICULAR WAS PREPPED TO ENSURE A SMOOTH TRANSITION FROM TEEN POP IDOL TO FULLY GROWN ARTIST

MATTHEW LINDSAY

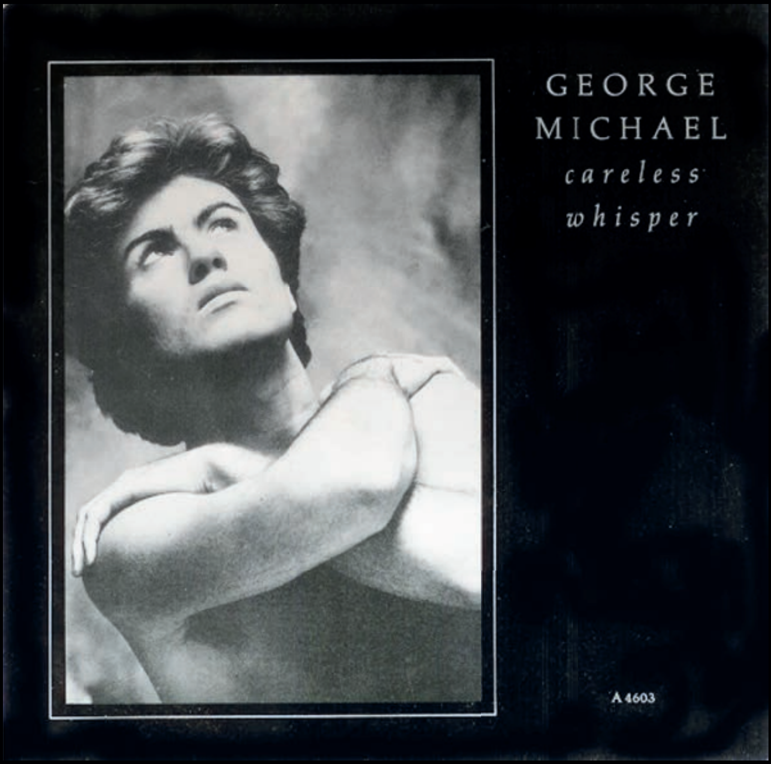
By 1984 Wham! were firmly ensconced in pop's premier league. They'd returned after legal strife, extricating themselves from Mark Dean's Innervision, with their first No.1, *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go*. Following it with another, *Freedom*, only Band Aid could keep *Last Christmas* off the top spot. *Make It Big* would be the sole original album by a UK act in the year's Top 5 sellers, only Duran Duran fared better in '84's *No.1* and *Smash Hits* reader's polls. Sun-kissed with pearly white teeth flashing from camera-ready smiles, George Michael and Andrew Ridgeley were basking in the glow of mega-success. The radiant twosome had hit a glorious peak, but a summer single credited to George alone outsold all of Wham's '84 confections. *Careless Whisper* was a step away from Wham's youthful exuberance towards a deeper, 'mature' solo future.

But the tale of guilt-ridden infidelity and broken bonds on dancefloors originated from a pre-fame 1981, prompted by the messy entanglements of early teen romance. George had two-timed his girlfriend with a new Radlett local, whom he'd encountered years earlier accompanying his sister to an ice-rink in London's Queensway.

The melody had come to him, as they so often did, on a journey. In his 1990 autobiography *Bare: George Michael, His Own Story*, the singer recalled that the sax line floated into his head as he handed his bus fare over to a conductor en route to DJ at Northwood's Bel Air restaurant.

The tune evoked his destination, conjuring a world of candlelit tables and after dinner slow dances (the lyrics' "silver screen" hints at another early job: cinema usher at Watford's Empire). It also fitted neatly atop a minor chord progression Ridgeley had been working on with his recent 18th birthday present, a white Fender Telecaster.

Getty Images



Just some of the 45s that helped inform the sound of ***Careless Whisper***

Getty Images

WORK IN PROGRESS

They worked on the song for several months, including a fragment on their first demo, alongside *Wham Rap!* and an unfinished *Club Tropicana*. Cut with a four-track machine in Ridgeley's parents' lounge (a Teac says George, a Fostex says Ridgeley), they were accompanied by a Dr Rhythm drum machine and Dave West on bass, George singing into a mic attached to a broom. Still a work in progress, its original, clunky opening lines ("As I fall once more/ I smell the varnish of this dancefloor") couldn't obscure its hit potential. George already had his sights set on airplay, inserting odd, unforgettable images like "Guilty feet have got no rhythm". "I like to have a line or two that makes your ears cock up when you hear it on the radio," he'd later tell *Smash Hits* in '84.

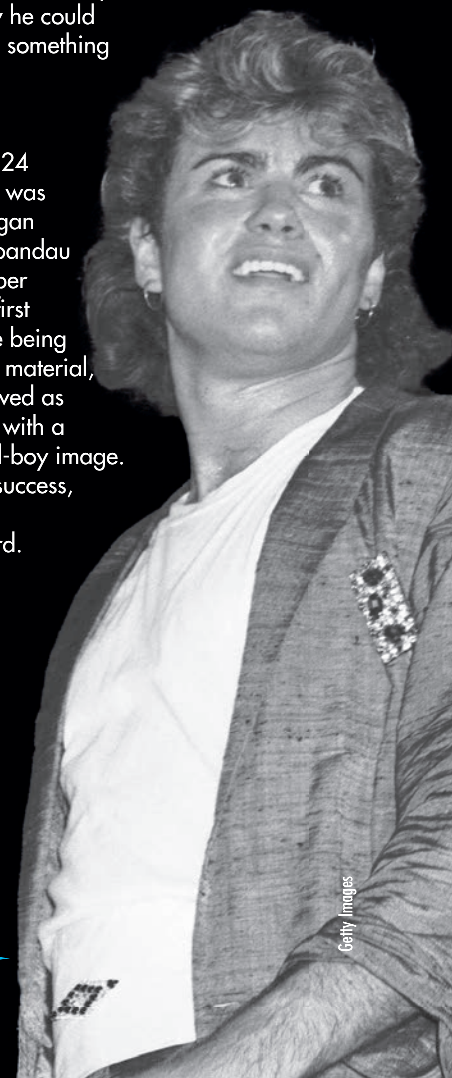
> "I LIKE TO HAVE A LINE OR TWO THAT MAKES YOUR EARS COCK UP"
>
> GEORGE MICHAEL

Careless Whisper's soulful bare bones emerged in a year when Black music (and its influence) vied with synth-pop as the sound of '81, from the Brit-funk explosion to Grace Jones' *Nightclubbing* (ABC's original *Tears Are Not Enough* hit shelves that October). *Careless Whisper* bore traces of '81 releases such as Hi-Gloss' post-disco ballad *You'll Never Know* and Was (Not Was)'s *Where Did Your Heart Go?* (later covered by Wham!). But it also contained elements of the previous decade's mournful MOR, specifically Elton John tearjerkers like *Sorry Seems To Be The Hardest Word* (from George's fave, 1976's *Blue Moves*). In '84 George told *No.1* he was "definitely derivative. But I don't want to be original. I want to write good pop songs.' *Careless Whisper* showed, early on, how he could synthesize sources into something unmistakably his own.

NO.1 MATERIAL

A few months later on 24 March '82 a full demo was cut at Holloway's Halligan Band Centre, where Spandau Ballet, back in November '79, had played their first invite-only gig. Despite being convinced it was No.1 material, it was temporarily shelved as they launched Wham! with a defiant, fun-loving bad-boy image. After *Fantastic*'s huge success, *Careless Whisper* was deemed ready to record. With a limited lifespan baked into Wham!'s teen-dream DNA, the co-written song would be credited to George alone, a launchpad for a solo career.

George travelled to Sheffield, Alabama to record it at the legendary Muscle Shoals studios with veteran producer Jerry Wexler,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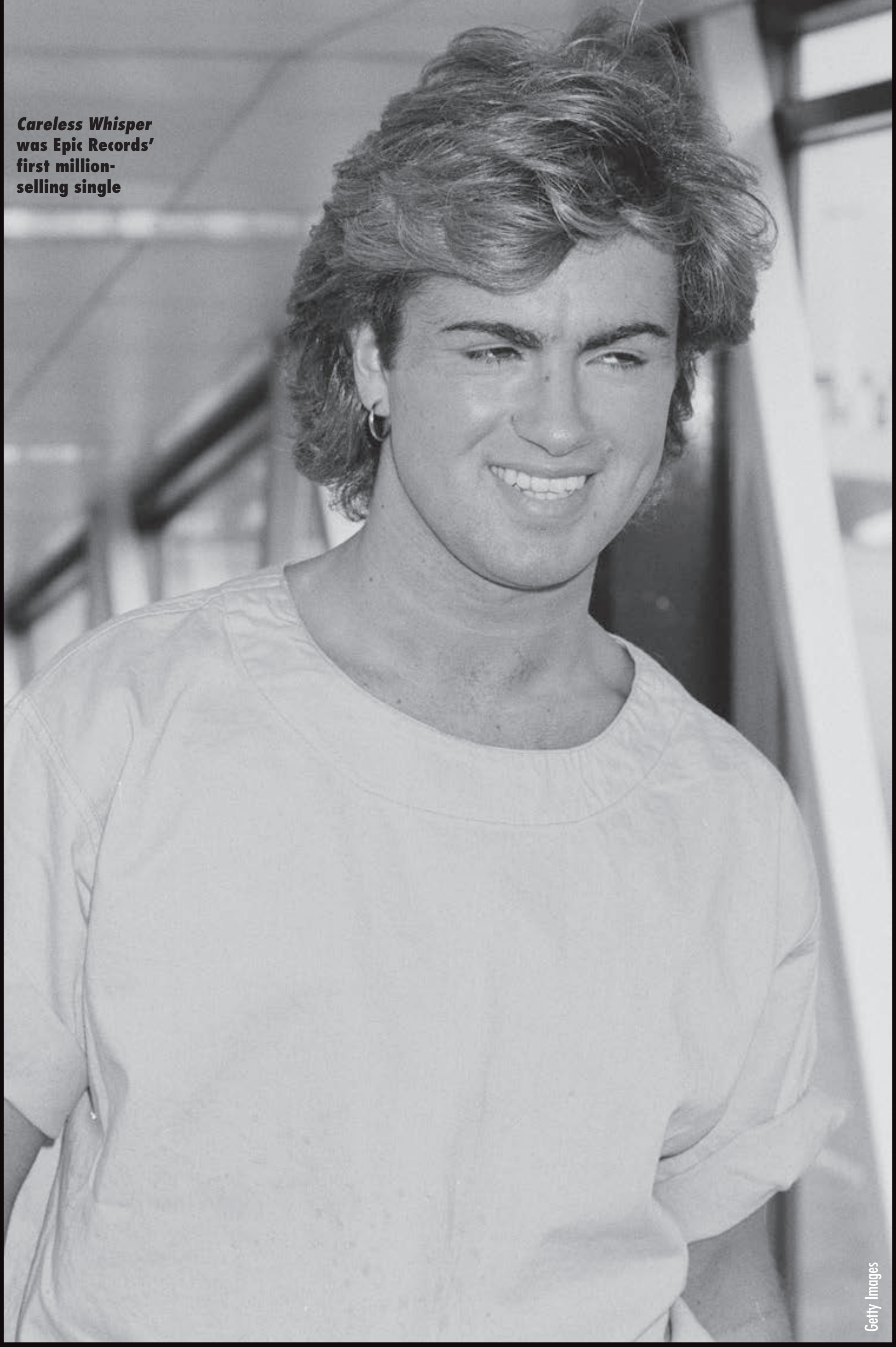


Careless Whisper was Epic Records' first million-selling single

Getty Images

Future George Michael collaborator Aretha Franklin with *Careless Whisper*'s original producer Jerry Wexler in 1967

Getty Images

following in the hallowed footsteps of soul stars Aretha Franklin and Ray Charles. Inside the vocal booth his idols had sang from, George 'froze up', his nerves assuaged only by getting drunk. There were other problems. A top-shelf sax player flown in from L.A. couldn't quite capture the sound that had come into George's head on that bus journey in '81.

George returned home, at first too dazzled by the illustrious cast he'd just worked with to admit that the recording was flat, lifeless. "There wasn't enough of me in it," he explained to *Modern Recording And Music* in June '85. After talks with publisher Dick Leahy and Ridgeley, it was agreed a redo was required.

TAKING CHARGE

This time George took charge, self-producing with Wham! regulars bassist Deon Estus, drummer Trevor Murrell and guitarist Hugo Burns. Recording largely took place at ZTT HQ, Sarm West, though engineer Chris Porter told *MRM* that Advision was used for the 'old-fashioned' vocals. Basic tracks were cut quickly, one take, live, then sprinkled with overdubs. Only Chris Parren's keyboards were credited on the sleeve, but other layers of synths were woven in by ZTT star-players, Anne Dudley (who'd featured on *Fantastic*) and Andy Richards (the wizard on Frankie's *Relax* and *Two Tribes*). It gave the blue-eyed soul a contemporary sheen: European, icy synth strings, bell-like electric piano sparkle from Yamaha's new fangled DX7.

Richards also sampled Michael's voice using the PPG Wave, creating a choral wash, reminiscent of 10cc's *I'm Not In Love*. As *Careless Whisper* faded another 'vocal' synth can be heard, similar to the Fairlight ARR1 preset, the sound of cutting edge '84 pop. Sax players came and went, still unable to achieve the sound George required, until Steve Gregory suggested slowing the tape down, playing the line a semi-tone lower. Played back at normal speed, George heard the sax sound he'd been searching for – sad, soulful, ever-so-slightly artificial.

The result was a masterpiece, best heard on the long version where its constituent parts come sumptuously to the fore, the delay of Gregory's sax making its arrival goosebump-inducing. It showed George's growing confidence, jettisoning Wexler's version for a far more sensual, unique recording, blending warm-blooded soul with immaculate UK pop artifice. Twinkling with textures like Ridgeley's acoustic guitar, evocative of holidays abroad, it was topped off with an exquisitely judged vocal; coolly poised, wistfully yearning, as rich as the instrumentation (the counterpoint that wafts through the second chorus is a subtle masterstroke). "I've always been a perfectionist," George joked to *No.1*, "now I can afford to be." A solo auteur was born.

A video had already been shot to the Wexler version, directed by Duncan Gibbins, in faraway, exotic Miami. It was pure soap opera, similar to Spandau's '84 jet-set promos, George two-timing his girlfriend (Lisa Stahl) with an

older woman (Madeline Andrews-Hodge), a love triangle playing out on yachts and in boudoirs where sunlight streaks in through venetian blinds and from the top floor balcony of the luxurious Grove Towers. Discovering his infidelity, Stahl dramatically exits by sea plane (her goodbye letter delivered by Ridgeley). A day's shoot had to be scrapped when George decided his hair made him look like Shirley Bassey, flying his sister in to rectify it, adding £10,000 to the budget. Then it had to be re-edited to the new version, the Miami scenes reduced, now intercut with footage of George on a dark stage at London's Lyceum Theatre, accompanied by ropes and chains, shots of his silhouetted back framed by golden light; a sultry, moody and adult world away from Wham!

THE JOY OF SAX

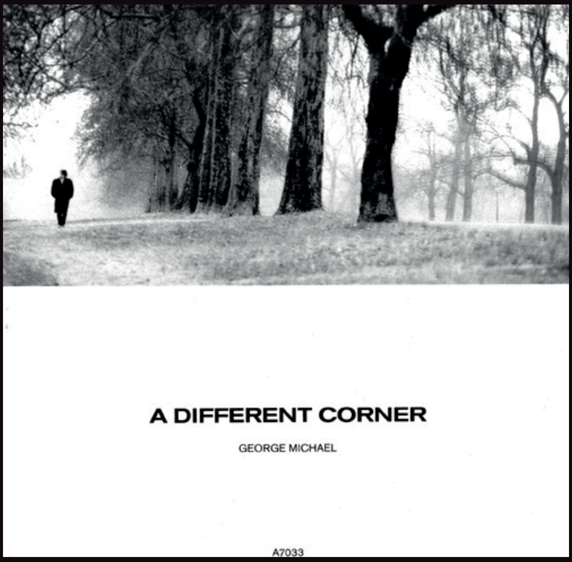
Careless Whisper was released on 23 July 1984, housed in a PSA-designed black and white sleeve, a pensive George photographed by Tony McGee, a cute dedication to his parents on the back – 'Five minutes in return for 21 years'.

> "I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A PERFECTIONIST. NOW I CAN AFFORD TO BE."
>
> **GEORGE MICHAEL**

Smash Hits' guest reviewer Muriel Gray thought it had "the most beautiful sax-playing since *Baker Street*", but was also "too American to be completely successful". *No.1* was more effusive, hearing a sure-fire chart-topper that "has got it all", including the ability to "break teenage hearts on the last night of holiday camp".

Its timing was impeccable – sax-soaked smooch was in that summer, with Sade's *Diamond Life* hitting shelves the previous week. Weepies sodden with male romantic regret were also a big '84 staple, from Phil Collins' *Against All Odds* (US No.1, UK No.2) to Jim Diamond's *I Should Have Known Better* (No.1). Ending Frankie Goes To Hollywood's *Two Tribes*' nine-week reign, *Careless Whisper* stayed at No.1 for three weeks, becoming one of the UK's Top 5 bestsellers that year. It was a global smash, hitting the top spot in nearly 25 countries, including the US where it was credited to Wham! featuring George Michael. Before Wham! split George topped the charts solo again in '86 with another gorgeous ballad, the Satie-like splendour of *A Different Corner*.

George was cool towards *Careless Whisper*, acknowledging it was a "wonderful thing" that it had "connected with so many people" but even upon release, he called it "naïve", later comparing it unfavourably to the deep gospel soul of *One More Try*. Part of this was the maturing artist's tendency to dismiss their earlier work as callow, the folly of youth. "I hadn't experienced anything so strongly," he said, suggesting he felt the song's sentiment wasn't sufficiently rooted in authentic emotion (unlike '96's *Jesus To A Child*). Already aware of his sexuality (see '83's *Nothing Looks The Same In The Light*), he perhaps couldn't connect to the real life boy-girl romance that had sparked the song back in '81. None of this applies to the misty-eyed effect it induces on listeners and it remains one of his best-loved songs, covered by everyone from Julio Iglesias and Gloria Gaynor to heavy rock bands Seether and Eagles Of Death Metal. An enduring classic then, that perfectly positioned George for grown-up solo superstardom. ■



Written at Wham!'s peak, *A Different Corner* was "partly Wham! and partly the end of a relationship," George told *Musician* magazine

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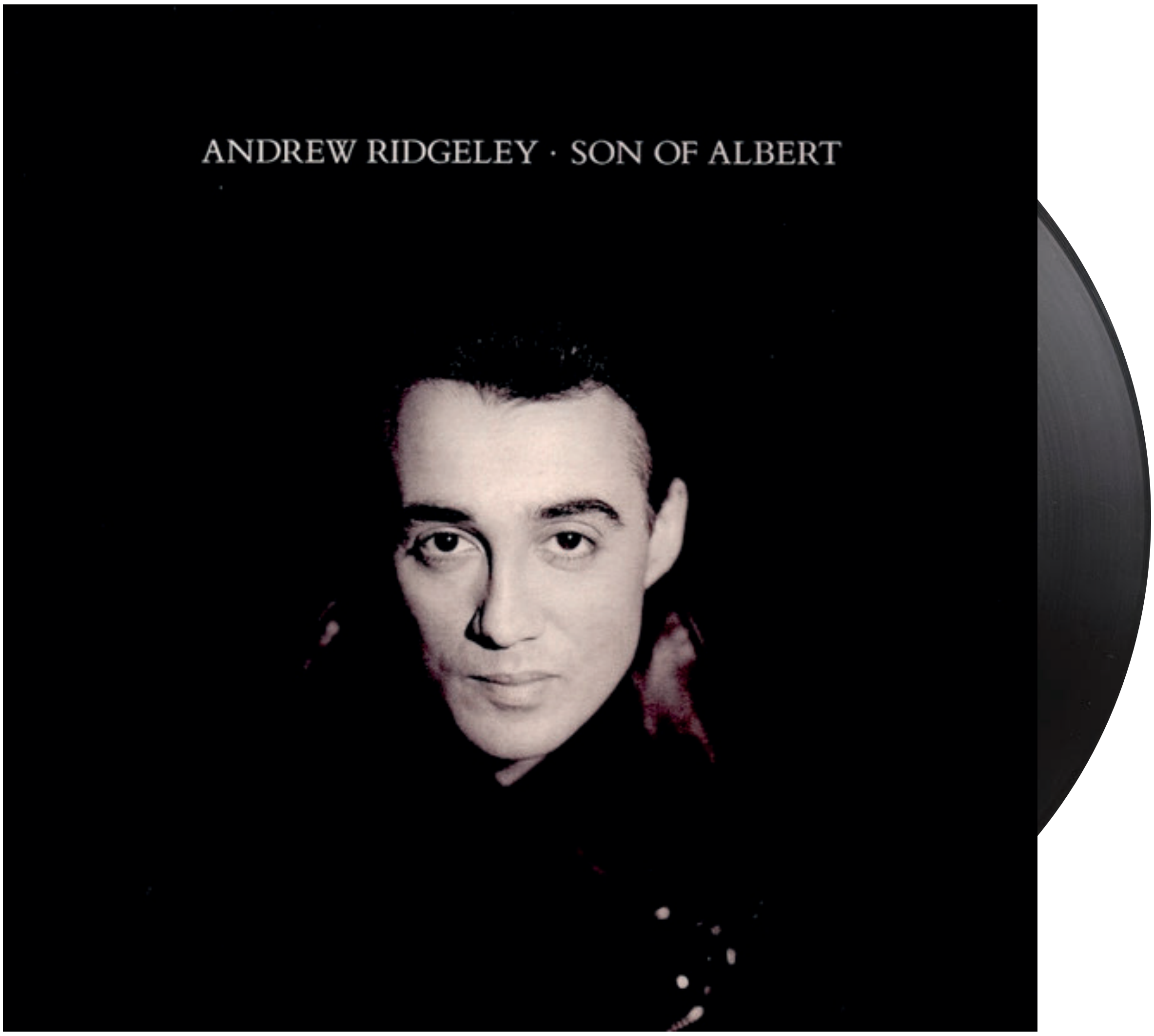

ALBUM INSIGHT

SON OF ALBERT
ANDREW RIDGELEY

WHEN ANDREW RIDGELEY'S FIRST – AND SO FAR ONLY – SOLO ALBUM DROPPED IN 1990, ITS HARD ROCK-INFLUENCED SOUND ALARMED MANY WHAM! FANS

ALISTAIR POWELL

Beyond a relatively muted 2018 reissue, Andrew Ridgeley's 1990 solo LP is all but forgotten. It swerved the UK Top 75 entirely and was almost universally panned by the press on release. Nonetheless, while he's always accepted his songwriting chops weren't up to those of his Wham! comrade, it's also clear that Ridgeley was much more than the handsome sidekick. And while he'd honourably clear the lane for his uber talented friend to go stratospheric, he had played his part, in *Wham Rap!*, *Careless Whisper* and *Club Tropicana*, three of the duo's finest. Plus, as is mentioned liberally elsewhere here, he was savvy to what made a pop star pop. Indeed, without his charismatic Bushey Meads bestie we would never have had George Michael.

A usually reclusive Ridgeley did the media rounds last year for the release of Netflix's *Wham!* documentary but when the duo bade farewell at Wembley in summer 1986, he all but disappeared from sight. Brief forays into racing cars in Monaco and acting in L.A. had amounted to nothing and he'd seemingly settled on enjoying the spoils of his success. And why not? After all, he'd had 10 Top 10 hits, four of which were No.1s, not to mention amassing a reported £20 million fortune in the process. This Young Gun had gone for it, no fears, no tears, and music, it seems, wasn't high on the agenda in the immediate years that followed Wham!.

Beyond telling *No.1* magazine in a final interview that his musical aspirations amounted to "just one single", Andrew had already made it clear to us two years prior on *Wogan* that his plan was to "retire with grace". He'd later inform

Hello! that all he wanted to do at the time was "to get as far away from the music industry as [he] could."

And so, when Ridgeley resurfaced at the turn of the decade, it might have seemed strange to an outside world that he'd come back at all. But, regardless of hours lost to fast cars and film sets, his hiatus was a time, as he's mentioned many times, of rebirth, of growing up, of introspection. And, it turned out, of writing his first solo album.

Ridgeley's one and only solo effort, lovingly named after his dad – from whom he'd taken those all-important style tips as a youngster – found him in entirely different territory to the hyper-pop climes of Wham!. Beyond its black and white sleeve, noticeably echoing George's own first solo release with *Careless Whisper*, instead of glossy synth-led earworms, here was a collection that wriggled restlessly somewhere between Skid Row-inspired hair metal and stadium rock.

Released in May 1990, when glam was on its way out and grunge was on its way in – and in the shade of *Listen Without Prejudice* sending George further into the realms of megastardom – *Son Of Albert* seemed an oddity, doomed for failure. Nonetheless it's worthy of a revisit, if only to add colour to the narrative of George and Andrew.

Recorded in numerous studios – rural Surrey and London to Paris, L.A. and a stint at the iconic Compass Point Studios in the Bahamas – personnel included session musicians, programmers, and friends and family including Wham! bassist Deon Estus, The Damned's Paul Gray, Andrew's brother Paul – sometime percussionist for Bananarama – and Gary Bromham, who would co-produce and co-write five of its tracks. Lastly, Jamiroquai producer Martyn 'Max' Heyes was installed to provide the production gloss.

Listeners were immediately compelled to strap in, as *Red Dress*' heavily delayed power riff, race car engines and squealing false harmonics spectacularly dive-bombed our ears, Ridgeley's scream of "C-c-c-c'mon!" loudly signifying the volte-face. Wham!'s final single had taken us to the edge of heaven, now Andy was enjoying the far more devilish pleasures of the "sugar sweet" object of his affections, "all curves and thrust", "silk and lust", "hotter than a rocket on the Fourth of July"… More AC/DC than *Smash Hits*, teeny-boppers the world over no doubt spluttered on their Sunkists. "He likes it an awful lot," Ridgeley told Dutch TV show *Countdown* of George's affections for the track. As such, it's the only one helped along by his old Wham! bandmate – "we co-wrote the bridge," Andrew told *NME*, "he helped me out with the melody on that" – as well as his former bandmate singing backing vocals.

It's surely no accident that the LP's big hope for a hit, *Shake*, married rhythmic acoustic guitars, a la George's own reinvention, *Faith*, and a far poppier direction to gently reorientate any confused Wham! fans to this alien environment. Sadly, while it deserved a better run, it tanked, landing at UK No.58, the 81st biggest-seller in Australian that year.

No matter, Ridgeley clearly cared not a jot, and appeared to be having a whole lot of fun mining his rock influences and mostly singing about girls. "I wanted to make guitar music," he continued to *Countdown*. "Music that was glamorous, that had that performance aspect to it, music with a kick to it, you know, some guts. What I've done on this album was to draw from a lot of influences that I had as a kid, the records around the house when I was young – The Rolling Stones, The Beatles, rock'n'roll, Elvis."

Yet those influences appear all but absent from *Son Of Albert*. This is far more glam – Poison, Bon Jovi, Def Leppard, Motley Crüe – bombastic, full-tilt musical hyperbole. None more evident than in Ridgeley's interpretations of its two covers. More from the Wham! camp, came Chic's *Hangin'*, in Andrew's hands jacked up with full-on hard rock guitars. More surprising is a take on The Everlys' shimmering 1965 single *The Price Of Love*, here pumped full of pomp.

With *Shake* falling flat, two further singles were ditched: *Flame* was a mid-tempo MOR rocker written with school pal and George collaborator Dave Austin, while *Mexico* followed in a similar vein. The final trio comprised *Big Machine* and *Kiss Me*, that dutifully continued the rock, and the pleasant harmonica-driven ballad *Baby Jane*.

It was all decent enough but, while conceived with jet-fuelled intentions, it never quite clears the runway. *Son Of Albert* showed Ridgeley certainly had something, but it wasn't to be. From *Rolling Stone* doling out a measly half a star to being panned as "fake-raunchy rock and roll" by *Entertainment Weekly*, it's fair to say the album killed any further songwriting aspirations that Ridgeley may have harboured.

It seems, despite the critical onslaught, Ridgeley wasn't – and still isn't – that bothered and it's interesting to note that the LP doesn't get a mention in the Netflix documentary. When *Hello!* asked him if there would ever be any more solo material, his response spoke volumes: "I don't think that's any great loss to anyone. First, it would be a real uphill struggle to re-establish myself should I want to, and secondly I'd have to make too many sacrifices in terms of lifestyle, and I don't want that either."

All's well that ends well, then.

THE VIDEOS ▶▶

SHAKE

A simple performance video, *Shake* begins bathed in purple and pink hues as a cowboy-hatted Andrew sings with acoustic guitar into a retro mic, before – cue 'flats-in-Dagenham' drum fill – we're thrust into the stadium. The cowboy hat is swapped for a Slash-esque top hat, then it's all retina-melting full-beam stage lights, liberal strobes, Marshall stacks and plentiful posturing.

RED DRESS

A topless Andrew is joined by a drummer in black leather as he strums a black Strat surrounded by various ladies in revealing red dresses – from flappers to yuppies to smoking temptresses to stars and stripes leather. Yet more Marshalls are stacked to provide a backdrop for a heavy rocking Ridgeley, before he's joined on a revolving chair by one of the girls.

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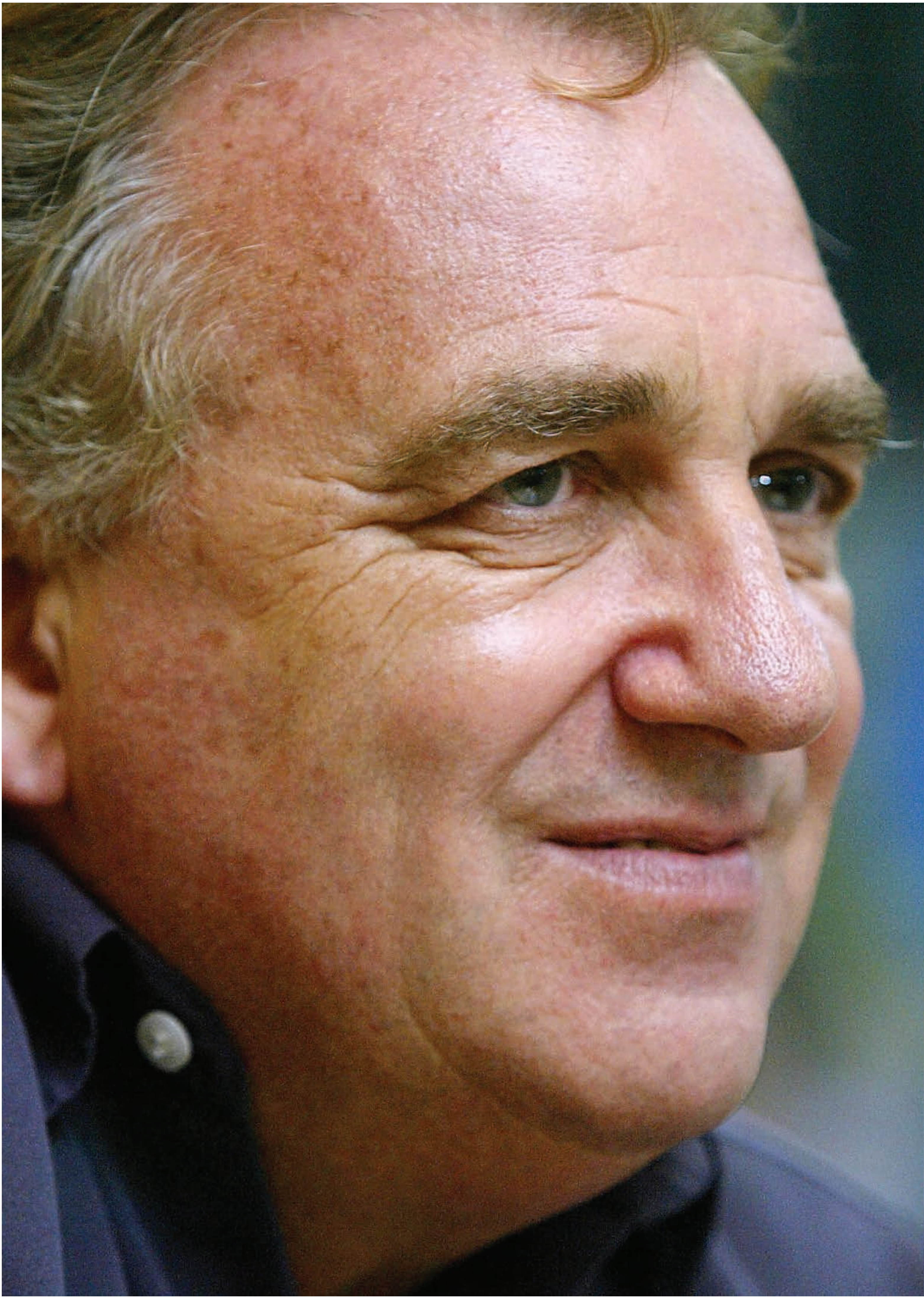
Andrew pictured backstage prior to Wham!'s The Final Show at Wembley in 1986



SIMON NAPIER-BELL

Managing Wham!

SIMON NAPIER-BELL CO-MANAGED WHAM! DURING THEIR METEORIC RISE AND SUBSEQUENT BREAK UP. HERE, HE REVEALS THE MASTERPLAN FOR THE BAND AND BEYOND, AND HOW WHAM!'S LONGEVITY AND GEORGE'S SUBSEQUENT SOLO SUCCESS WERE ULTIMATELY DEFINED BY MICHAEL'S SEXUALITY...

ANDY JONES

While he doesn't admit it, Simon Napier-Bell and co-manager Jazz Summers were massively instrumental figures in Wham!'s success. They took the duo from minor chart-hitters to teen sensations in weeks, helped extricate them from a terrible record contract, and rose to the challenge to make Wham! the biggest band in the world in record time.

Napier-Bell maintains that their success was a "series of lucky episodes", but his experience managing bands including Japan and The Yardbirds helped the group through difficult legal times, and gained them the tabloid hysteria that gave them their early impetus.

He also cites another factor in the band's success: the George Michael masterplan. In this interview, he reveals how George had his entire career mapped out, from teen band to solo star, and that the only thing that came close to undoing it was his own sexuality. But before that, Napier-Bell reveals how his own plan led to him meeting George and Andrew in the first place.

"Jazz and I made a list of artists we wanted to work with," he recalls. "the artists we thought we could take from stage one to be mega, like Eurythmics and Culture Club, and Wham! were one of them. We saw that they didn't have a proper manager and we knew their publishers, so talked to them and they suggested a meeting.

"We'd seen that fantastic first *Top Of The Pops* with *Young Guns (Go for It!)*. They looked like a pair of twins, young guys around town, out for one thing. But when they came to the meeting, it was extraordinary. Andrew was the same guy on TV: easy-go-lucky, feet on the coffee table, 'nice pad, man', but George was suspicious and asking: 'Why do you want to manage us? What will you do for us?'

"He was completely different and I thought that was wonderful; not to just be these crazy, happy-go-lucky guys, but have one that was interested in the business – a great combination. Although George was difficult, suspicious and didn't trust us, to me that made him worth managing, and in conjunction with Andrew who was giving him the image."

After deciding to work together, Napier-Bell's first task was to help Wham! get out of a contract with their first record company, Innervision, not something he relished.

"Nothing can be more stupid than when you get your first hit, you try and get out of your contract," he says. "However bad the deal is, you stay with it and get four or five hits and then look at it. But George was adamant: 'This was the wrong contract and

Simon Napier-Bell began his career as a music editor in the film business and went on to manage The Yardbirds, John's Children with Marc Bolan, Scaffold and a nascent Average White Band

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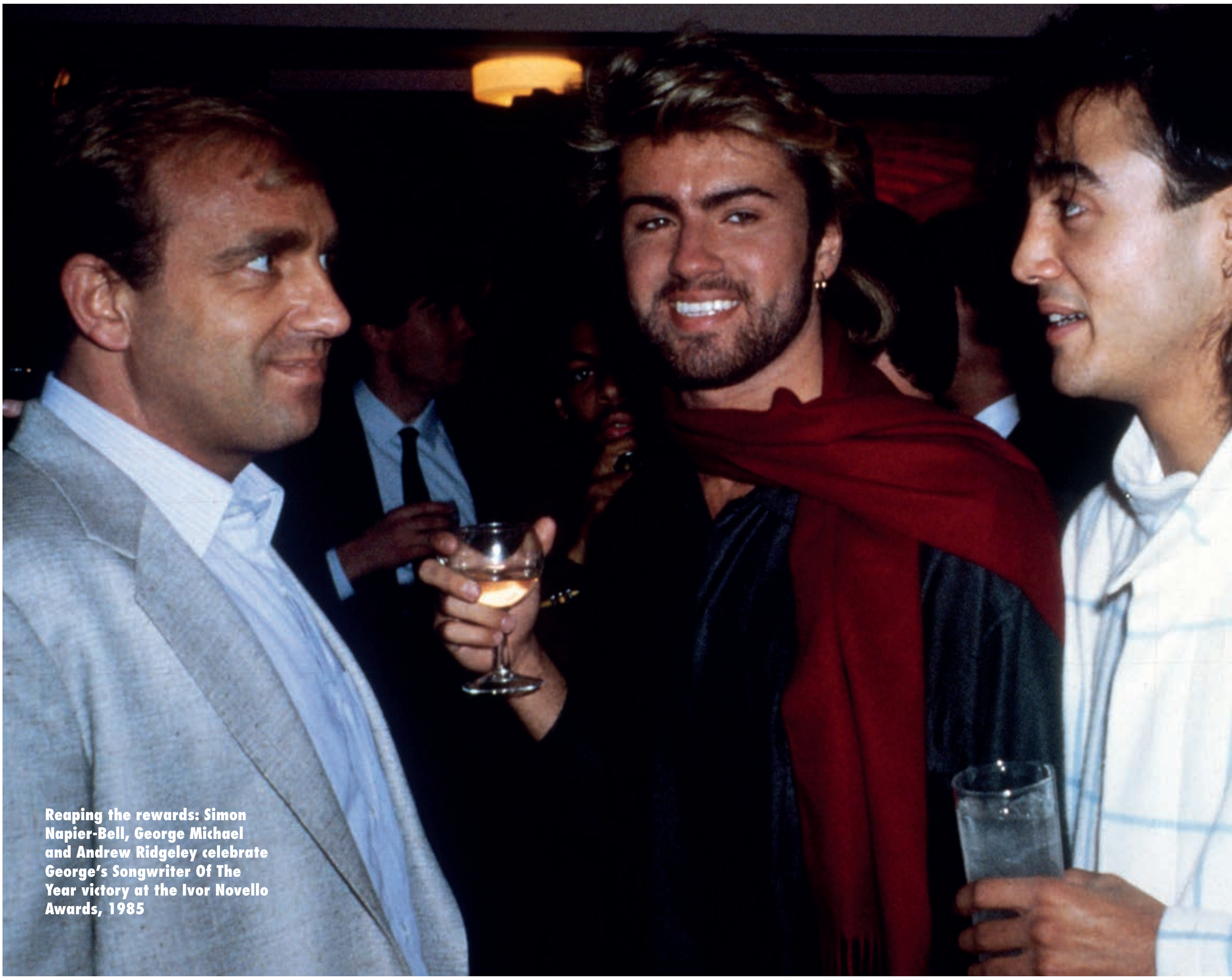

Reaping the rewards: Simon Napier-Bell, George Michael and Andrew Ridgeley celebrate George's Songwriter Of The Year victory at the Ivor Novello Awards, 1985

we must get out of it.' So that was our job: to get them out of the contract which had just got them their first hit. We decided to let it get to three hits and then take action, so we re-released *Wham Rap! (Enjoy What You Do)* which became a hit, and then *Club Tropicana*. Then we said, 'Let's do it.'"

In order to finance the court case, Napier-Bell and Summers had to get the band some cash, and quickly. Wham! were basically broke at this point – "which was the reason they were fighting the record company," adds Napier-Bell – so they decided to get them out on tour.

"Both Jazz and I had a lot of experience of how to manipulate the music business, so with a lot of hype, we managed to get them set up on a really big tour. It went brilliantly: the tabloid papers put "Wham! Mania" all over the front pages, the money came in and the court case started. That resolved itself in the cynical, corporate way that I knew it would."

Napier-Bell's other task, meanwhile, was to turn Wham! into the biggest band in the world, and it really was laid out to him by George in those terms.

"The second meeting we had we went for dinner, and as we sat down, George fixed us with a steely glare and said, 'You've got one year to make us the biggest group in the world.' I burst out laughing, saying, 'The biggest group in the world has to be the biggest in America because that's 60% of the market. No one has done that in less than three years. Even The Beatles took that long – you just can't do it.'"

To make the task even harder, George then insisted that he didn't want to do any interviews in America. "He was just so difficult," Napier-Bell laughs, "but as the evening progressed, out of the third or fourth bottle of wine, an idea popped up. It was: 'Maybe we could make you the first group to play in China and then you'd be huge.' George liked that."

Three weeks after that extraordinary meeting, Napier-Bell found himself in China trying to organise gigs for the band. It would take all his guile and some cunning – in doing so he would have to undermine rock band Queen's efforts to achieve the same feat – but Wham! ended up being the first Western band to play in the country.

"It was quite an adventurous time," Napier-Bell notes with some understatement. "18 months later they played in China, and two months after that they played a stadium tour – the quickest it has been done. By then they'd broken America and were the biggest group there."

Napier-Bell and Summers had managed to complete George's monumental request, then, or so they thought… "Wham! played L.A. Race Course with 70,000 people and we met in the dressing room after," Napier-Bell recalls. "Everyone burst in – Burt Bacharach was there, Dionne Warwick, and Elton

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Andrew and George – with Pepsi & Shirlie in the background – pictured during Wham!'s world-spanning Big Tour in January 1985

John, and he said, 'You bastards, it took me five years to break America and you've done it in 18 months.' George turned to me and said, 'You see, you failed!' [laughs]."

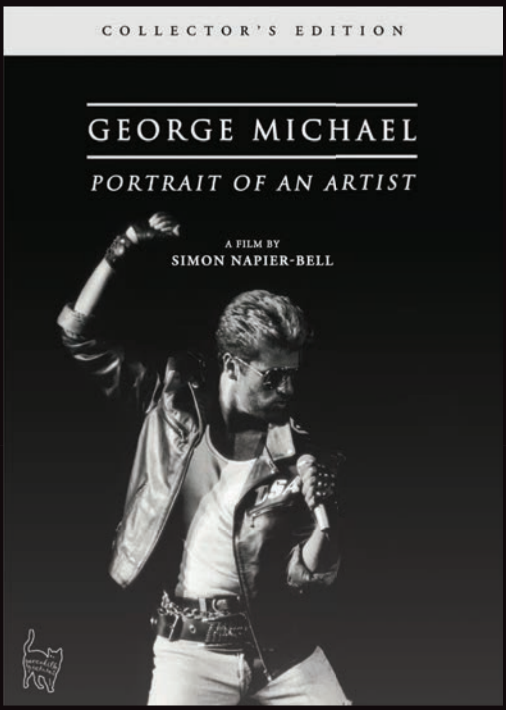
Just as the Wham! reached their peak, so the end came almost as quickly. But then Simon was always aware that it was on the cards. In fact, he'd known it would happen from the start.

"George had it planned out," he reveals. "Right at the beginning he was saying, 'We're not going to go on forever. When we stop being teenagers we don't want to be in a teenage group.' It was meant to be three albums and four years, but by the time the second album came out, George was saying, 'I can't go on with this'.

> JOURNALISTS ARE VERY INVESTIGATIVE AND THEY DON'T LIKE BEING LIED TO AND GEORGE HATED LYING
>
> **SIMON NAPIER-BELL**

"It was the gay thing really," he continues. "He couldn't tell the truth about being gay, as Wham!'s image was too based on that whole heterosexual bromance, the 'Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid' thing. It was complex, but he decided he wouldn't [come out] but might do when Wham! broke up. But journalists are very investigative and they don't like being lied to and George hated lying. So he was defending himself and the pressure was huge, and by the second album he didn't want to be involved with it.

"Andrew was fantastically good about it [the break up] because he knew from the beginning he wasn't a star. Obviously he was thinking, 'We could do another year and do 100 dates around the world', and he had always wanted to do a third album. But they didn't and that was okay – Andrew had a great time and enough money to live on for the rest of his life. He knew he'd had the imagery to give George to make him a star and gave him the confidence – George wouldn't have had the confidence to go on



HEARD AND NOT SEEN

NAPIER-BELL ON HIS DEFINITIVE DOCUMENTARY

Having spent years putting *George Michael: Portrait Of An Artist* together, and interviewing the likes of Stephen Fry, Stevie Wonder and Rufus Wainwright along the way, did Simon discover anything about George that surprised him?

"Yes, it was really about his songwriting," he replies. "It's strange as I'd been in the studio when he was in Wham!, but didn't notice that he never wrote anything down – never. So when he wrote a song, he didn't do what most people do and think of the lyrics and write them down. He just wouldn't write it down, and no one had ever seen anything like it.

"Everyone thought he was making it up as he went along, but it wasn't quite like that. He wrote his lyrics out in his notebook with seven or eight alternatives, but his notebook was in his brain! So he'd sing a line with the backing track and go, 'That doesn't work, let's try this one', and I don't think he was making up the 'Let's try this one" – it was there in his 'notebook'! It was an extraordinary talent, so I learned that and a lot more about his philanthropy. I knew a lot about that already but found out much more."

© David Sandison / The Independent/REX/Shutterstock

Simon Napier-Bell's revealing music business books include *You Don't Have To Say You Love Me, Black Vinyl White Powder* and the Wham! in China memoir *I'm Coming To Take You To Lunch*

stage without Andrew. So they split and it couldn't have been any more amicable – there wasn't any bad feeling."

George's first solo album, *Faith*, was, of course, absolutely huge, but behind the scenes he was still wrestling with his honestly versus his sexuality. Being gay had never been part of the plan he'd made when he was 15, according to Napier-Bell.

"He'd always thought, 'I'm not really gay,'" he says, "but now it was suddenly very much in the equation. He just pushed it aside and then created the most heterosexual image you could – the leather jacket and the butch thing – which was going to make life far more difficult for him."

And even the album's success didn't help George – if anything, it exacerbated the situation.

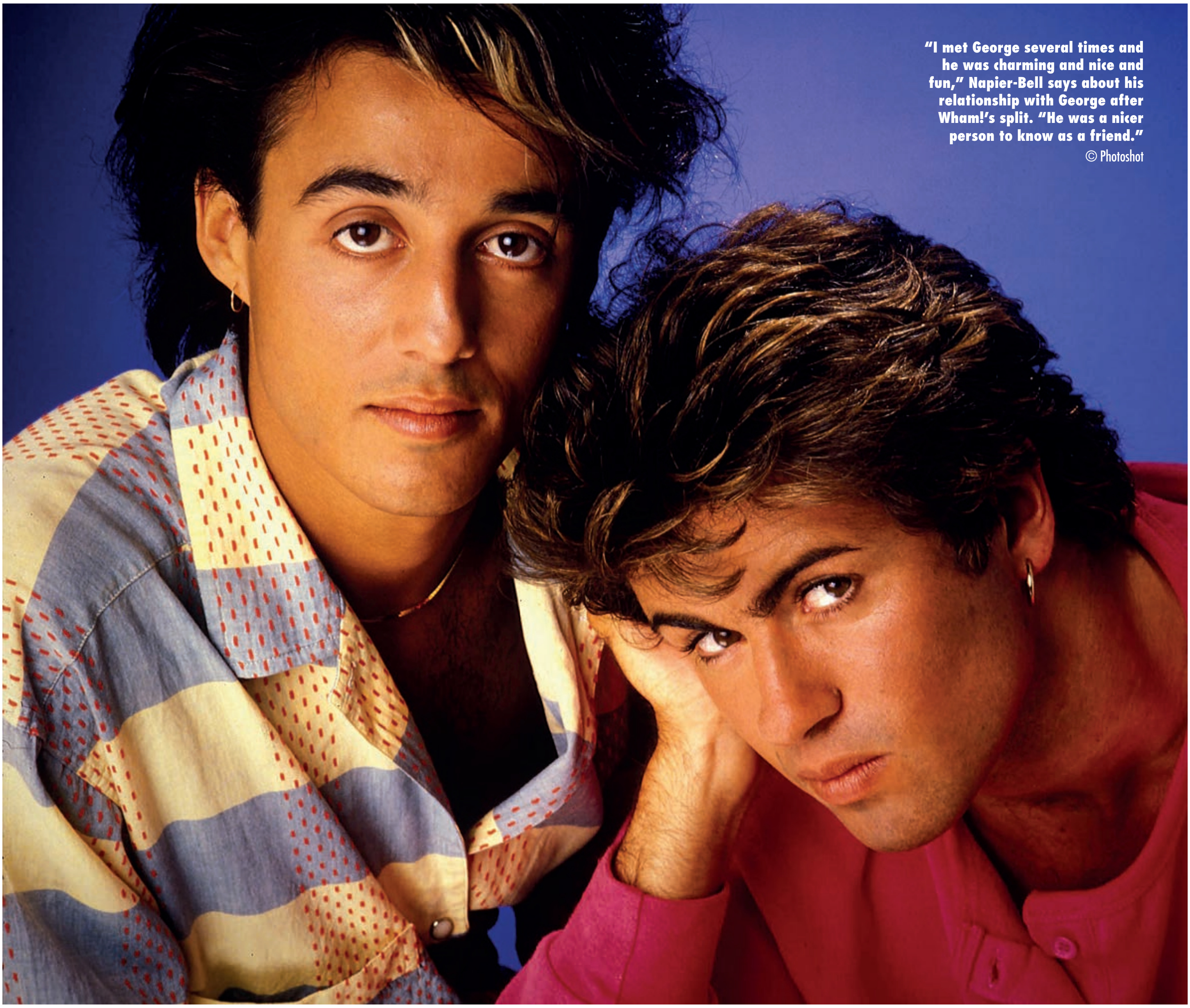
"*Faith* was hugely successful but it was a miserable life," Simon says. "George did a two-year tour so every night he's on stage and that's delirious, but then you go back to a room on your own with a guard outside. You're in your private five-star cell. You don't meet anyone unless they come and mob you for your autograph. When he'd done it with Andrew, it was fun, they laughed like, 'This is stupid, isn't it, but it's fun', but alone it's not fun. After two years he just didn't want to do it, he was never going to get himself in that situation again.

"That's when he first started fighting with the record company, made *Listen Without Prejudice Vol. 1*, his second album, and refused to make a video for it. And it was all to do with being gay and not having come out, and it was then getting more difficult to come out. This was the height of AIDS and in the music business, what he's selling is somebody that every fan wants to rush and touch and worship. Yet you have the press saying, 'If you touch someone with AIDS you will catch it and die.' That's pretty conflicting isn't it. So if you are a star like Freddie Mercury or George Michael, you think, 'I just can't [come out]' as it will kill your career."

By this time, Napier-Bell was watching events unfold from a distance – he'd given up managerial duties since Wham!'s demise, but had still kept in touch with George. To the present, and after seeing – and indeed appearing in – several documentaries on Wham! and George, Simon eventually decided to make his own, 2023's *George Michael: Portrait Of An Artist*. He wanted to create it without commentary and almost allow George to tell his own story.

"I'd seen four or five documentaries, and they were all complete crap, all rubbish," he says. "I was in them because they asked me to do the interviews and they were either sensationalised or trivial, very much a tabloid treatment.

"I wanted to make a documentary with people who understood him. I put the film together without any commentary, but with a lot of George talking, so it was like he could come into the conversation if he wanted to join in – it tells its own story. I didn't want to avoid anything. I wanted to make a film about an artist like Van Gogh or Rachmaninoff. You have to look at their personal life to some degree



"I met George several times and he was charming and nice and fun," Napier-Bell says about his relationship with George after Wham!'s split. "He was a nicer person to know as a friend."
© Photoshot

because that is where they found the material for their art. So that is the balance I was trying to get.

"I do feel people didn't understand a lot about him," Napier-Bell continues. "My real interest was that once he'd come out, he was so incredibly positive about being gay and so incredibly out. He wouldn't let any interview go by without bringing up his gayness and how normal it is and how it should be for everyone else. That I really approved of because no other artist really does it. They either say, 'I'm out and I don't want to talk about it' or they turn into a Graham Norton. George wanted to make a point that no one should get put off by being gay, it's not important and it's not going to stop you creating great art or being a star."

So having known George for so long and creating the documentary about him, how would Simon now describe him?

"He wasn't someone who aspired to intellectuality, but was the most intelligent person I ever managed, and extraordinarily perceptive," Napier-Bell reflects. "He wouldn't get involved in intellectual conversations, but he had a point of view that was just as valid. I wanted to get that across, that he was way more than just a pop star and that he had deeper thoughts and understanding than most people took him to have."

AS LUCK WOULD HAVE IT

NAPIER-BELL ON HIS ROLE IN THE WHAM! STORY

Whichever way you look at it, 18 months was an incredibly short time for Wham! to go from a single chart success to selling out 70,000 seaters in the States. So how much credit does Napier-Bell give himself now, looking back?

"George was massively talented and a huge songwriter, but this business is a series of lucky episodes for everybody," he replies graciously. "If he hadn't been sat next to Andrew in class when he was 11 years old, then he wouldn't have learnt to make himself look good and aspire to be anything. So there's your first bit of luck long before we met them. And you get this luck all the way along the line.

"Even Innervision was luck," he adds. "That was a guy down the road who signed them up, and he put some money behind them and got them the hit. They'd already been to every major company and got turned down. So they'd had that luck. And yes they were lucky to find us, but we were lucky to find them as we wanted the right thing at the right moment, so it all came together well."

Ready for the world: George at the start of the Faith world tour, 1988

© Getty

CLASSIC ALBUM

FAITH
GEORGE MICHAEL

SHEDDING HIS PAST, GEORGE DITCHED THE FUN AND SUNSHINE OF WHAM!, LOOKED INWARDS FOR INSPIRATION AND BARED ALL IN ORDER TO CREATE HIS FIRST TRUE MASTERPIECE…

MARK LINDORES

It's 28 June 1986 and 72,000 fans are bidding an emotional farewell to Wham! at The Final concert at Wembley Stadium. George Michael was experiencing mixed emotions. On the one hand, he was genuinely moved because, as he stated: "I knew inside that this would be the last time that I would ever perform some of those songs live". On the other, he was experiencing a sense of liberation that he could finally channel his energy and emotions into making the album he truly wanted to make.

The previous 12 months had been a time of professional highs, with Wham! experiencing a newfound critical appraisal to match their continued commercial success, but this was compounded by the lowest of lows in George's private life following the break-up of a relationship. "It was the worst feeling in the world," he told *Rolling Stone* of his subsequent depression. "Waking up and just wishing that somehow you could just go back to sleep and the day would disappear and you wouldn't wake up. I felt like that for ages."

The failure of his relationship, at the time the most significant of his life, had a profound effect on George, altering his views on everything, particularly his career. In late 1985, having begun laying down tracks for Wham!'s third studio album, he decided to end the group. Although songs such as *I'm Your Man* and *The Edge Of Heaven* were among the strongest of Wham!'s career, George felt that the direction in which he was heading as a songwriter was increasingly at odds with everything Wham! stood for.

Andrew and George bid farewell to Wham! at Wembley Stadium, 1986

THE SONGS

1 FAITH
The church organ playing Wham!'s *Freedom* sounded the death knell of George's former group while symbolising how he felt to be embarking on a solo career. This intro gives way to an upbeat rockabilly track, based on the familiar Bo Diddley beat. Released as the second single, *Faith* reached No.2 in the UK and topped the charts in the US, becoming the biggest-selling single of 1988.

2 FATHER FIGURE
Far from being the gorgeous, gospel-inflected ballad we know today, *Father Figure* began life as an upbeat dance song, but George stripped it back and removed the snare from the mix, leaving it as a ballad. Sung in a husky, lower-register voice, the sensual track hinted at the turmoil around George's sexuality with lyrics such as *"That's all I wanted/ But sometimes love can be mistaken for a crime"*. Although the song gave George his third solo US No.1, it was his first single to (just) miss the UK Top 10.

3 I WANT YOUR SEX (1&2)
Despite being tame by today's sex-drenched standards, *I Want Your Sex* was the subject of a huge amount of controversy when it was released in May 1987 as the first single from the album. Given the climate at the time, with the spread of HIV and AIDS at its terrifying peak and George still regarded as an act predominantly aimed at the teen market, the release of a song so controversial was branded irresponsible. George defended himself with the claim that the funky R&B track celebrated a monogamous relationship (*"Sex is natural/ Sex is fun/ Sex is best when it's one on one"*). *I Want Your Sex* was released in three 'acts' – *Rhythm 1: Lust, Rhythm 2: Brass In Love* and *Rhythm 3: A Last Request*, the latter included on the CD version of *Faith*. The song became a Top 10 hit on both sides of the Atlantic, and its US success was bolstered by an appearance in *Beverly Hills Cop II*.

4 ONE MORE TRY
He may still have been only 24 years of age, but George's lyrics – written from the point of view of a man wracked by the fear of being hurt again – were delivered with complete conviction, as was the vocal itself. His agonising indecisiveness is played out meticulously over the course of the ballad's six-minute-plus running time before he succumbs at the end and agrees to give the relationship "one more try" – the last line being the only time the title is sung. As well as reaching No.8 in the UK, it gave him another US No.1 single.

5 HARD DAY
Hard Day is probably the most dated-sounding song on the record (especially compared to the timeless ballads). An electro-funk experiment, the track features synths and sequencers plus voice-changing studio effects; towards the end George is made to sound almost female, much like Prince on the 'Camille' songs on *Sign O' The Times*.

6 HAND TO MOUTH
While pop in the post-Live Aid late-80s saw pop stars increasingly developing a social conscience, George had been including social commentary into his lyrics since day one with tracks such as *Wham! Rap*. *Hand To Mouth* is a brief respite from love, sex and relationships, and saw him juxtaposing two stories of two Americans who had fallen on hard times – a prostitute and a 25-year-old pushed to the edge who embarks on a shooting spree. Three decades later, the stories are still relevant.

7 LOOK AT YOUR HANDS
This track about domestic violence is stylistically akin to Wham!'s *Edge Of Heaven*, suggesting it was one of *Faith*'s earlier compositions, or even a planned track for the third Wham! album. *Look At Your Hands* continues the rockiness of that song with a bluesy feel courtesy of a blistering brass section and screaming sax.

8 MONKEY
On the surface it's a fun, polished pop song, but "monkey on your back" is slang for drug addiction. George called on US hit-makers Jam & Lewis to remix the song for its release as a single after he fell in love with their revamp of Janet Jackson's *Nasty*. *Monkey* became his fourth Billboard No.1 single from the album (his eighth overall), equalling records set by Michael Jackson and Whitney Houston, but it stalled at No.13 in the UK.

9 KISSING A FOOL
Completing *Faith*'s trilogy of timeless classic ballads, the sublime, jazz-inflected *Kissing A Fool* set a precedent for George's future as a truly great balladeer. The lyric explores his insecurities about committing to a relationship; it was one of the first songs written for the album (and provided the original working title, until *Faith* usurped it). Reaching No.18 in the UK and No.5 in the States, *Kissing A Fool* was the lowest-charting single from *Faith*… but it was the sixth single from an album that had been on sale for over a year and which had already sold in the millions.

"I was finding it increasingly difficult to write for the group image," George admitted. "I was writing much more personal lyrics, and it felt increasingly strange for me to be singing those lyrics as head of this two-man group. Things were going downhill because we were growing up; neither of us were teenagers anymore. There was never any question that Wham! was going to end earlier than a group's normal lifespan because it was not a musical entity – it was an image entity. It was a group that was based around an image and music, but one wouldn't work without the other. And for it to work, the image had to be two guys having a laugh, having a good time, and as soon as that got boring for us it would get boring for other people."

While George and Andrew had always been aware of Wham!'s shelf life, George admitted that his troubled personal life marked the beginning of the end for the group. "The actual Wham! split was definitely provoked by my emotional distress around that period," he mused. "It's hard to tell whether or not it would have happened at that time had it not been for that relationship failing. Maybe if I'd felt more secure, I would have felt no need to shake things up. But at the time I just wanted to make a clear start. Basically, I didn't want to be a star anymore, because I was feeling so sorry for myself."

After coming to a decision about the future of Wham!, plans were put in place for the band's last act. The songs recorded for the third album were released as *Music From The Edge Of Heaven*, and *The Final* greatest hits album was released in May 1986 to coincide with their farewell concert at Wembley Stadium.

While the concert truly marked the end of an era, it allowed George to throw himself into a new chapter as a solo artist. Having already achieved two solo No.1 singles with *Careless Whisper* in 1984 and *A Different Corner* later in 1986, both of which allowed him to explore a more mature direction than with Wham!, he was beginning to feel inspired again musically, particularly when afforded the opportunity to perform with his musical idols.

Having already forged a strong rapport with Elton John – he duetted with him at Live Aid, and provided backing vocals on *Nikita* and *Wrap Her Up* – and performed with Stevie Wonder and Smokey Robinson at a Motown anniversary concert, the ultimate honour came when George was invited to duet with soul queen Aretha Franklin on *I Knew You Were Waiting (For Me)*. As well as being another No.1 hit around the world, the true measure of the song's success was personal. "It proved to me that I was capable of standing onstage with a great singer and holding my own," he said. "Which was something I'd never really considered before."

This newfound confidence, coupled with a wealth of lyrical inspiration drawn from his personal problems, ignited a period of complete musical freedom, with George choosing to divide his time between London and Denmark to both write and record his debut solo album.

© Getty Images

George in Australia: the 137-date Faith world tour took almost a year and a half to complete

"I WAS VERY EXCITED MUSICALLY, THAT I HAD MY OWN VOICE, THAT I'D WORKED WITH ARETHA FRANKLIN. IT WAS THE FREEST TIME OF MY WRITING." **GEORGE MICHAEL**

Assuming complete control of the entire process, he wrote everything, produced everything and, thanks to some clever use of state-of-the-art studio equipment, managed to play almost every instrument eventually heard on the record. It was a personal breakthrough. "I was very excited musically, that I had my own voice, that I'd worked with Aretha Franklin and that everything had gone so well," he confirmed. "It was the freest time of my writing – I was like a kid in a sweet shop. I could do any period that I wanted, any style that I wanted, and I'd get a hearing. Not that people would buy everything…but however good or bad it was, it would get a hearing and it would still get played on the radio. We were still in the era where we expected more of records and we were allowed to do different things – and you could have incredibly unusual-sounding records reach No.1."

This creative freedom resulted in an accomplished set of songs that encompassed pop, rock, soul, R&B, jazz and funk, and while the focus of the album was love, sex and relationships, George also tackled subjects such as domestic abuse, gun crime and prostitution.

THE VIDEOS ▶▶

I WANT YOUR SEX
The promo video for *Faith*'s lead single *I Want Your Sex* was banned by both the BBC and MTV for its risqué nature. Featuring George with his then-girlfriend Kathy Jeung in a clinch draped in satin sheets and with some mild bondage and a scene in which George writes the words "Explore monogamy" with lipstick on her naked body, the video perfectly suited the track's sleazy funk.

FAITH
Intended to give George a tougher image, the iconic *Faith* video saw him adopt silver-tipped boots, ripped Levi jeans, a BSA leather jacket, shades and designer stubble, though he softened the look somewhat by adding a string of pearls under one epaulette. The look became one of his most famous, but he would symbolically set fire to the jacket in his *Freedom '90* video.

FATHER FIGURE
For the album's fourth single *Father Figure*, George portrayed a brooding New York cab driver consumed with jealousy, loosely based on Robert De Niro's Travis Bickle character from 1976's neo-noir thriller *Taxi Driver*. In a hint of many George videos to come, it featured supermodel Tania Coleridge, and earned the singer a Best Director prize at the 1988 MTV Awards alongside Andy Morahan.

MONKEY
After the powerful impact of the videos for *Faith* and *I Want Your Sex*, the clips towards the end of the *Faith* era were much simpler. *Monkey* featured George by now moving away from his rocker look and sporting a white shirt, braces and a hat, dancing in front of a plain white backdrop. Again directed by Andy Morahan, the video is elevated by footage taken during the Faith Tour.

"I'M ALREADY REGARDED AS ONE OF THE MAIN POP WRITERS OF THE 80s, BUT I WANT TO BE REGARDED AS THAT THROUGH THE 90s. I THINK MY MUSIC DESERVES IT"
GEORGE MICHAEL

One of the album's more daring tracks, the titillating, media-baiting slice of electro-funk that is *I Want Your Sex*, was released as the first single and drew criticism largely due to its title. It was promptly banned by the BBC, who were still suffering from the aftershock of Frankie Goes To Hollywood's *Relax* and seemed to baulk at anything remotely controversial.

Despite its title, the song was actually a paean to monogamous relationships, but its message was lost in translation. The furore cost George a No.1 single but it was still a sizeable hit (it peaked at No.3) and helped broaden his fanbase beyond the largely teenage fans that had followed his career since the Wham! days.

Released on 30 October 1987, *Faith* became an instant smash, topping the album charts internationally and selling over a million copies in its first week in the US alone. While commercial appeal had never been a worry for George, the album was met by universal acclaim from the critics, who praised his bravery, his experimentalism and his balladry on an album, which saw him achieve his goal of matching the success of Michael Jackson, Prince, Madonna and Whitney Houston, global superstars who were now his peers.

The release of the album marked the beginning of a lengthy period in which George would emerge as one of the biggest stars in the world. Following *I Want Your Sex*, *Faith* produced a string of hits that would not only ensure the album was a permanent fixture in the upper echelons of the charts worldwide for the next two years but would also set records that would stand for decades. The title track, *Father Figure*, *One More Try* and *Monkey* were all US No.1 singles and global hits, while *Kissing A Fool* became the album's swansong, giving George a record-breaking six-single run, fuelled by a gruelling 17-month world tour which visited the US, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, the Far East and Canada.

The album went on to achieve sales of over 20 million copies and was the biggest-selling album in America in 1988, with *Faith* also the biggest-selling single. Having achieved the biggest-selling single of the year with *Careless Whisper* in 1985, George was the only artist other than The Beatles to achieve the feat. The accolades continued come award season with George picking up three American Music Awards, a BPI Award and a Grammy for Album Of The Year, and he finally rounded off the *Faith* era in September 1989 when he was presented with MTV's Video Vanguard Award by no less than Madonna.

The success of the album and world tour far exceeded anything George had envisioned. "I was very proud of the album but I never for one second thought it would be bigger than Wham!," he claimed. "I wanted success in America, but I didn't want to be the biggest thing of the year there. It was great for my ego but all the way through I was thinking, 'Oh, what are you doing?'"

Having craved global success and done everything possible to achieve it, George was to find that being the biggest star in the world came at a price and was, ironically, faithless and empty. Feeling imprisoned by his success (he wore sunglasses for two years as he was unable to look anyone in the eye), he vowed that his career would take a much more low-key direction in the future. With *Faith*, he had achieved everything he set out to do and more… and learned some valuable life lessons along the way.

"I think I'm already regarded as one of the main pop writers for the 80s," he told *Rolling Stone* in 1988, when asked about his hopes for the future. "But I want to be regarded as that through the 90s and do something to carry on, something that's really memorable, so the music becomes something historical. I think my music deserves it."

With subsequent albums *Listen Without Prejudice Vol. 1* and *Older*, George achieved his goal, but the gloriously catchy melodies and beautifully crafted ballads of *Faith* are the foundation on which his musical legacy is built. ■

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GROWING UP IN PUBLIC

REELING FROM THE PRESSURES OF BECOMING A GLOBAL POP ICON, GEORGE MICHAEL BEGAN THE 90s IN DEFIANT MOOD AHEAD OF A ROLLERCOASTER DECADE THAT CONTAINED PROFESSIONAL HIGHS TOGETHER WITH PERSONAL LOWS…

STEVE HARNELL

As the 90s dawned, George Michael was arguably the most important solo star on the planet, thanks to huge sales of *Faith* as well as multiple Grammy, MTV and BRIT awards.

But far from revelling in the spoils of victory, George was recoiling from the pressures of being a worldwide celebrity. In the *A Different Story* TV documentary, he gave an insight into his post-*Faith* campaign mental landscape: "I was intelligent enough to know I should not be trying to catch up with Michael Jackson or Madonna, which was absolutely what I was [previously] intent on doing. I felt *that* tired and exhausted at being the centre of that much attention. I suppose the way my lack of mental balance showed itself was that I actually really began to hide away when I got home, and did almost nothing for a year but try to re-establish some idea of a real life."

Apart from suffering the wearing intensity of life in the goldfish bowl of mega pop celebrity, George felt he had been unfairly criticised for the R&B album and R&B male artist American Music Award categories he won in 1989 as part of the *Faith* campaign – gongs traditionally won by black artists. Although George had always openly exhibited his love of R&B and soul music throughout his career, the backlash against the success of his crossover appeal left him feeling isolated and under siege.

Faith's follow-up was therefore conceived in a less-than-positive state of mind by the songwriter. Dark clouds gathered, and the resultant introspective material was a clear indication of the inner turmoil that George was feeling.

Right: George Michael in 1996 in a portrait taken to promote his album *Older,* released on Virgin in the UK and DreamWorks in the US after a recording hiatus of over five years

© DreamWorks / Everett Collection

George on stage with Elton John at Live Aid in July 1985; the pair resurrected their duet of ***Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me*** with a No.1 single in 1991

© Solomon N'Jie/Getty Images

Influences: the Paul McCartney-style *Heal The Pain* single of 1991 plus 1990's *Waiting For That Day*, which gave a credit to Jagger and Richards

With The Beatles' *Abbey Road* and *Revolver* on constant rotation as inspirations, *Listen Without Prejudice Vol.1*'s mature songcraft was there for all to see, although his US record company's description of it as "George Michael's *Nebraska*" seems ridiculous now; the polished work from Michael, although equally inward-looking and often downbeat, was far more intricate and varied than the stripped-back austerity of the Bruce Springsteen album of 1982. *Praying For Time,* George's breathtaking ballad that acted as lead single for the album, was released on 13 August 1990, three weeks ahead of *Listen Without Prejudice Vol.1*. A stark musing on social inequality, it was some distance removed from the crowdpleasing pop of *Faith*.

When the album finally arrived it won generally positive reviews, although some critics mourned the apparent loss of George's positivity and joie de vivre. The album topped the charts in the UK but stalled at No.2 in the States. Singles from the album unaccountably failed to set the world alight, with the resulting *Freedom! '90, Waiting For That Day*, *Heal The Pain, Cowboys And Angels* and *Soul Free* often merely making blink-and-you'll-miss-them entries in charts around the world.

Although the LP would go on to sell eight million copies, it was seen as a disappointment in the US where it shifted only two million – a figure dwarfed by the seven-time platinum magnitude of the seven-million copy success of *Faith*.

CHANGING THE GAME

What followed was an ugly stand-off between George and his record company, Sony. Michael believed that the only way to preserve his own sanity throughout the new album campaign would be to bow out of promotional duties altogether (he subsequently claimed his label never fully supported his new album in the US and let it wither on the vine).

Meanwhile, his record company felt George's no-show in the PR game left it impossible for them to gain any traction with the public. The finger-pointing would eventually lead to bitter legal action.

George outlined his feelings about publicity in the *Freedom* TV documentary: "I was still struggling with the idea of having that much attention. I think I recoiled from that and felt that stepping back would save me somehow from screwing up my career. I see hard-sell promotion as prostituting myself… I can't help it. Even if that's a complete fallacy, that's how I see it. I'm of that generation."

After George spoke to the *Los Angeles Times* about retreating from promotion, Frank Sinatra wrote him an open letter telling him to get over it: "Be glad that God gave you this gift and get out there and use it". "I don't think he wrote the letter!" George later revealed. "I actually believe it was the work of a publicist, not the work of a genius. Even though he's the greatest singer who ever walked the planet as far as I'm concerned, I wasn't taking any advice from Frank Sinatra!"

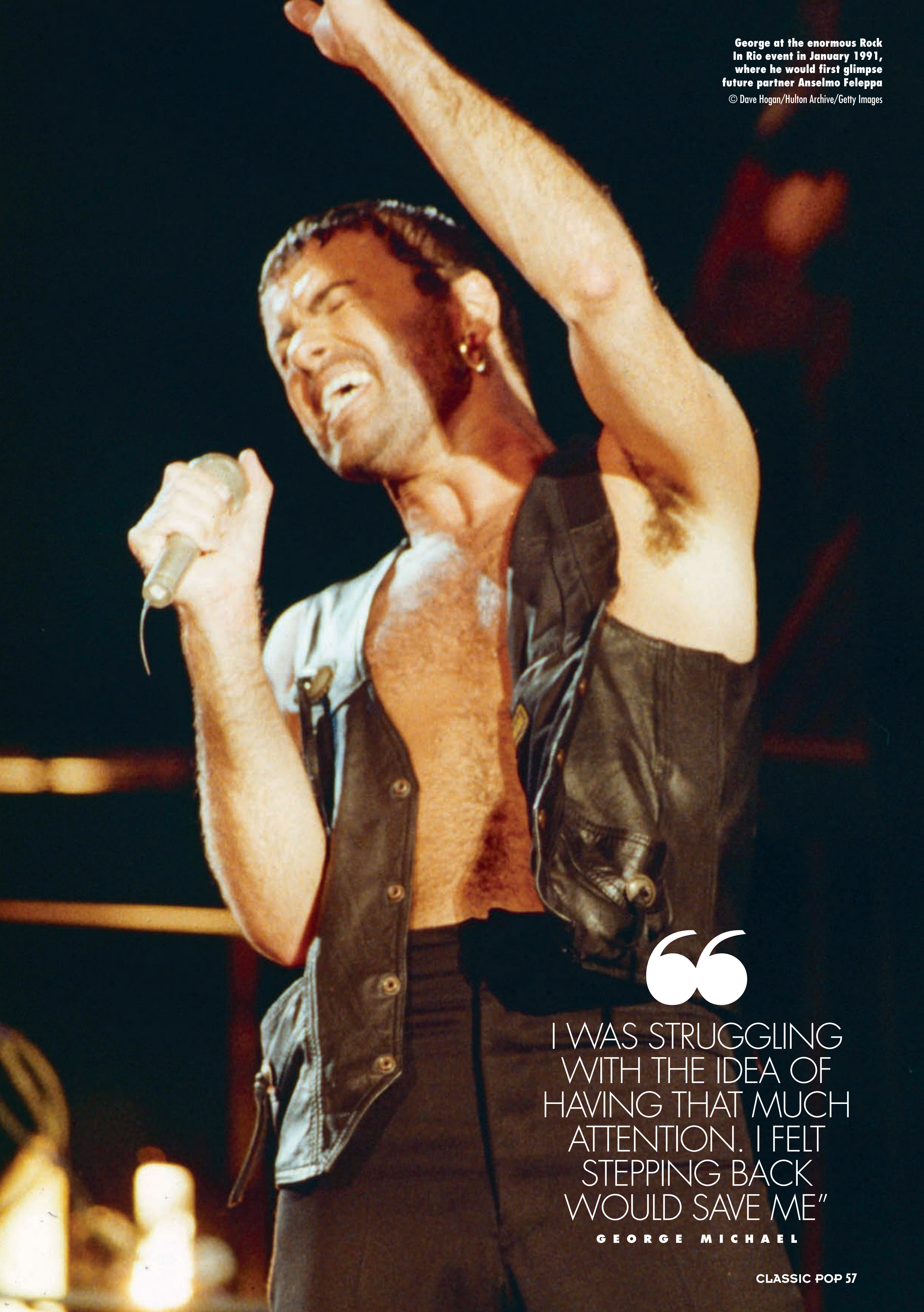
UNDER THE COVERS

Further adding to the obfuscation surrounding the promotion of *Listen Without Prejudice Vol.1,* rather than promoting the album with 'traditional' live shows highlighting new tracks interspersed with some of his greatest hits, George decided to stage the Cover To Cover tour, filling the setlist predominantly with versions of songs by some of his favourite artists, leaving his own material often in the background.

The Cover To Cover tour was George's second expedition as a solo artist and it spanned 30 shows over nine months from January to October 1991. Taking in the UK and US, Canada, Brazil and Japan, the shows paid tribute to the likes of David Bowie, Culture Club, Soul II Soul, Terence Trent D'Arby and Adamski, with only the tail-end of the setlists reverting to hits from Wham! plus cuts from *Faith* and *Listen Without Prejudice Vol.1*. His cover of Elton John's 1974 hit *Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me* made regular appearances; Michael first sang it with the star himself at Live Aid in 1985, and it would go on to become a much-needed hit when released as a one-off single.

On a personal level, the Cover To Cover tour would change George's life dramatically. An audience member at the Rock In Rio festival in Brazil – a temporary stop-off on the tour proper at the Maracanã Stadium, which at 160,000 people would be the biggest show Michael had ever played – went on to have a huge impact on the singer over the coming years. That man was Anselmo Feleppa.

In the *Freedom* documentary, George explained: "At the front of these 160,000 people was this guy on the right-hand side of the stage [who] just fixed me with this look. He was so cute. I was so distracted by him that I stayed away from that area of the stage for a while because otherwise I thought I'd get really distracted and forget the words!



George at the enormous Rock In Rio event in January 1991, where he would first glimpse future partner Anselmo Feleppa
© Dave Hogan/Hulton Archive/Getty Images

"I WAS STRUGGLING WITH THE IDEA OF HAVING THAT MUCH ATTENTION. I FELT STEPPING BACK WOULD SAVE ME"

GEORGE MICHAEL

HOLD ON TO MY FREEDOM

THE SONY COURT CASE

© Nick Skinner / Associated Newspapers/REX/Shutterstock

'Panayiotou v Sony Music Entertainment' – the official name of the court case that George, under his real name of Georgios Panayiotou, instigated against his record company – would prove to be a pivotal moment in the songwriter's career and for the music industry in general… but not for the reasons he had hoped for.

Claiming he was operating under a regime of "professional slavery" and that Sony failed to properly promote *Listen…* in the US, leading to underwhelming sales, George argued that the recording contract he'd signed as a young man was grossly unfair and tied him to a life of servitude. The singer wanted the High Court to declare his contract with Sony null and void, claiming its length of 12-15 years was unreasonably long. His view was that any individual has the right to walk away from their employer if they so wish, but the record industry took away that right.

In the *Freedom* documentary, he ruefully added: "I can't think of one artist that supported me. I know of a lot of artists that sat back and waited for the result, but that's a different thing."

However, after a lengthy court case before the High Court of Justice's Chancery Division in London, Mr Justice Jonathan Parker ruled that the contract was in fact both reasonable and fair. Michael lost the court case "on every count". "I regret it to this day," he later added.

In a statement after the judge's conclusion, George told the assembled press: "Having received this judgement, I would like to reiterate the reasons why I embarked upon these proceedings. I have no right to resign. In fact, there is no such thing as resignation for an artist in the music industry. Effectively, you sign a piece of paper at the beginning of your career and you're expected to live with that decision, good or bad, for the rest of your professional life. The initial view is that we have very strong grounds for appeal."

His stated intention to take an appeal to the House of Lords was only a bluff, according to manager and friend David Austin; George may have intended taking it to the Court of Appeal in the UK, but the House of Lords or the European Court of Justice was never an option.

In the *A Different Story* documentary, George added: "The court case was a perfectly good place to put my anger [after Anselmo's death]. I used to run on the treadmill every day and play squash and do everything I could to get rid of all this anger and fear, but the best place for it was Court No.1, really.

"I do remember being absolutely gutted, not that I had lost but [despite] the record companies being absolutely outside reasonable law, there was nothing that required them to pull their socks up in any way. There was an inevitability to the end of youth culture as we loved it, but if artists from the early 90s [onwards] really had been masters of their own destiny, there is a possibility that *Pop Idol* wouldn't have ruined everything."

"The moment I looked at him, I got the feeling that told me I was going to get to know him very well and that he was going to be a part of my life. Anselmo was the first time I really loved someone selflessly. It was kind of immediate… everybody, with the exception of my family, was introduced to him very quickly because I felt that everything had changed. He was just very full of energy, very loving. I was happier than I'd ever been in my entire life."

SLAVE TO THE RHYTHM

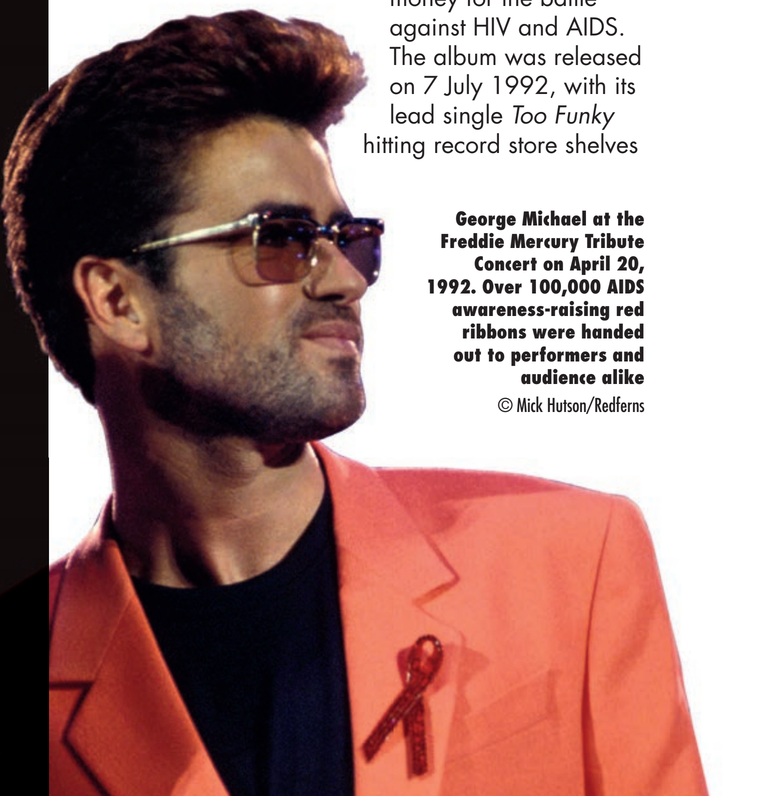
If *Listen…*'s success was less than expected in the US, the album proved to be on surer footing on home soil. Certified four-times platinum, it would go on to spend 88 weeks in the UK charts. A more immediate signpost of its success came at the 1991 BRIT Awards, which saw it win British Album Of The Year. George was nominated for British Male Solo Artist, but lost out to his friend Elton John.

But George's ultimate dissatisfaction with the way that his record company Sony treated him in the US in particular led to an ugly parting of the ways. With the exception of Prince's own battles with his record company, this was to be the most high-profile legal case the music business had ever seen.

Not only did Michael claim that Sony under-promoted *Listen…* as a direct response to his decision not to appear on the album's cover or in promotional videos, but the singer also alleged his recording contract prevented him from managing his own image or resigning and seeking a new label deal. With a phrase later seized upon by Prince, George described his deal as "professional slavery".

Under the terms of Michael's 1990 Sony contract, he was given a £1 million advance in February 1992 to provide a follow-up to *Listen Without Prejudice Vol.1*. This advance was returned in August of that year, with George filing a lawsuit in October. The decision to take his record bosses to the courts would be one of the most regrettable of his career.

With George knowing that the intended upbeat follow-up to *Listen…* would be permanently shelved, he made the decision to donate three of its songs – *Too Funky, Do You Really Want To Know* and *Happy* – to the *Red Hot + Dance* charity compilation to raise money for the battle against HIV and AIDS. The album was released on 7 July 1992, with its lead single *Too Funky* hitting record store shelves



George Michael at the Freddie Mercury Tribute Concert on April 20, 1992. Over 100,000 AIDS awareness-raising red ribbons were handed out to performers and audience alike

© Mick Hutson/Redferns

George and Linda Evangelista share a moment during the *Too Funky* video shoot in Paris, 1992

© Kevin Mazur/Getty Images

Three exclusive songs from the aborted *Listen...* follow-up opened *Red Hot + Dance*, with more tracks from Madonna, Seal, PM Dawn and others

a week later. A Top 10 hit across the world and No.4 in the UK, *Too Funky* succeeded in keeping George in the public eye, but on his own terms – a neat move which would have no doubt infuriated his paymasters.

CRUEL WORLD

Unfortunately, George's happiness with Anselmo was short-lived. Within a month or two of meeting George he found himself suffering a flu that he couldn't get rid of, and worrying red marks appeared on his chest. The pair were in Los Angeles when Anselmo was advised to be checked out for the HIV virus. While he took the test in Brazil, George went home to his family at Christmas. "I was sat at the Christmas table not knowing whether my partner – who the people around the table did not know about – this man who I was in love with, was terminally ill."

Anselmo's test, unfortunately, proved positive; George was devastated at the news that his lover was condemned by a terminal illness in his mid-30s. Shortly afterwards, the singer was contacted by his publicist to inform him that Freddie Mercury had died of AIDS-related pneumonia. "I was really sad that Freddie had passed away but I was crying for something else entirely – that my partner and possibly myself were both HIV positive," George added.

Five months after Mercury's premature death, a major charity concert was to be staged in his memory featuring some of the music world's biggest stars. In front of a live crowd of 72,000 and a global audience estimated at one billion, the Freddie Mercury Tribute Concert For AIDS Awareness would become one of the most significant concerts since Live Aid. After a first half which saw sets from acts including Metallica, Def Leppard and Guns N' Roses, the closing portion would see stars of the calibre of David Bowie, Elton John, Robert Plant and Roger Daltrey performing with the remaining members of Queen. Following Bowie's unexpected rendition of *The Lord's Prayer*, George blew everyone off the

The Freddie Mercury Tribute: "There's a certain note in his voice in *Somebody To Love* that was pure Freddie," said Brian May

© Kevin Mazur/WireImage

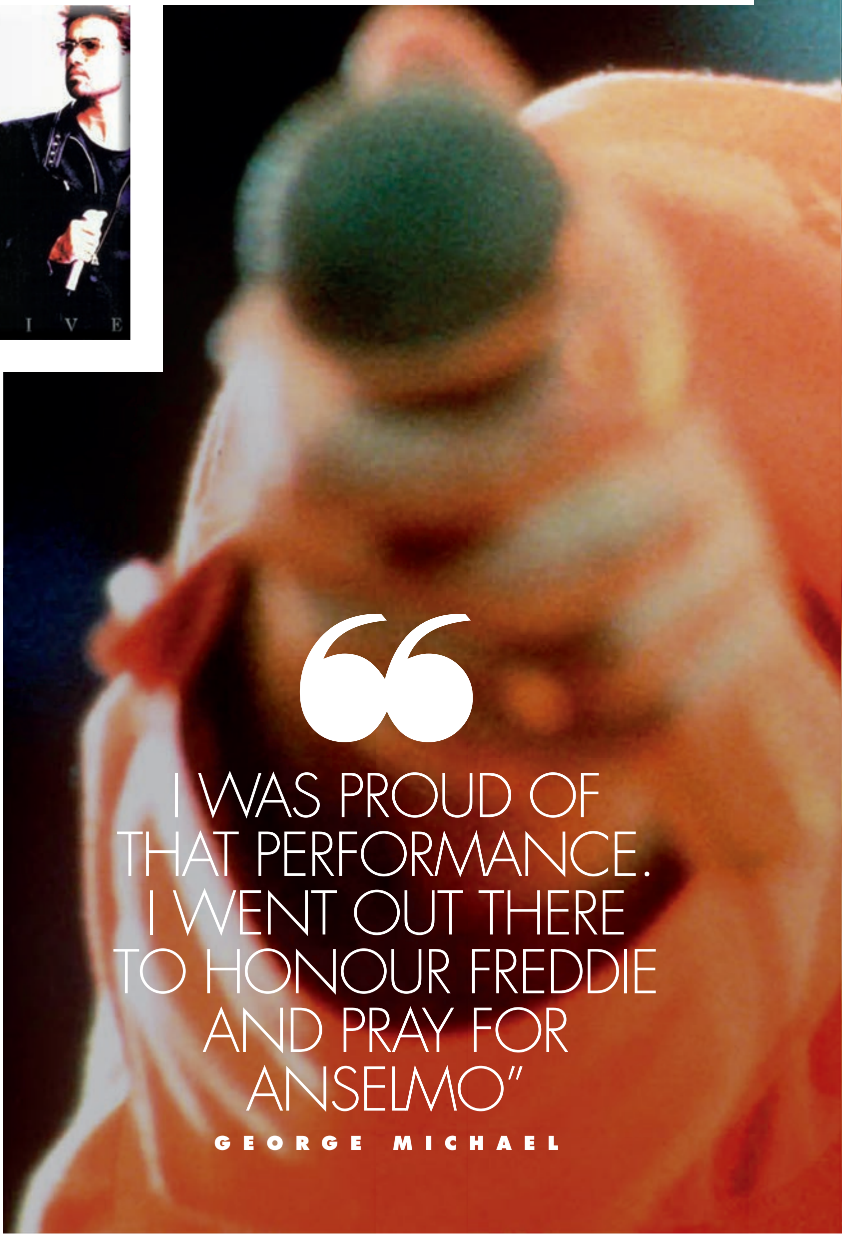
stage with a rousing three-song set, including *39* from Queen's *A Night At The Opera* album, and a duet with Lisa Stansfield on *These Are The Days Of Our Lives*. But it was a barnstorming rendition of *Somebody To Love* that will go down in history as one of the most iconic stage moments of his career.

Overwhelmed by the sadness of singing the songs of a man he'd worshipped as a child, George poured his heart and soul into his appearance. In *A Different Story* he recalled: "I'm very proud of that performance. I went out there to honour Freddie and pray for Anselmo. I just wanted to die inside. So it was so much to me, all in that one performance."

Following Anselmo's tragic death in March 1993, George released the *Five Live* EP a month later with all proceeds going to the Mercury Phoenix Trust, a charity organisation set up by the remaining members of Queen to fight HIV and AIDS worldwide. All recorded live, three of the songs – *Killer, Papa Was A Rollin' Stone* and *Calling You* – were taken from George's Cover To Cover tour, while two others, *Somebody To Love* and the Lisa Stansfield duet *These Are The Days Of Our Lives,* were culled from the Freddie Mercury tribute concert. On some iterations of the release Queen also provide a sixth track, the 1974 studio recording of *Dear Friends*. The EP was a huge success, topping the singles chart after its release in April 1993.

HEAVEN SENT

Although George's releases in 1992 and the following year raised considerable sums for charity, they masked the fact that in the wake of his loss in the courts against Sony and the death of Anselmo,



"I WAS PROUD OF THAT PERFORMANCE. I WENT OUT THERE TO HONOUR FREDDIE AND PRAY FOR ANSELMO"

GEORGE MICHAEL

George inviting the audience to join in during his showstopping spot at the Freddie Mercury Concert for AIDS Awareness

The video for the 1996 single *Fastlove* culminated in a rain-drenched dance sequence
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I KNEW MY AUDIENCE WOULD NOT DESERT ME IF THEY FOUND OUT I WAS GAY. I BELIEVE IN PEOPLE MORE THAN THAT"

GEORGE MICHAEL

George onstage at the 1995 MTV Awards, where he presented the Free Your Mind Award to agnès b on behalf of Greenpeace

he was struggling to tap into his songwriting muse. In the end, six years passed before the follow-up to *Listen...* saw the light of day. And it would be four years before George finally unveiled any new self-penned material at all, the heart-wrenching tribute to Anselmo, *Jesus To A Child*. The song was premiered in November 1994 at the inaugural MTV Europe Music Awards with a live performance in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. But it would be another two years before the track appeared on a finished studio album.

Appetite for new material from George was intense – *Jesus To A Child* entered the UK singles chart at No.1 in its opening week, a first for the singer. On the Billboard Hot 100 in the US it premiered at No.7, the highest new entry by a British artist for more than a quarter of a century.

The creation of *Jesus To A Child* proved to be a pivotal moment in George's re-emergence as a songwriter; he explained from then on it was "all systems go" as what became *Older* began to take shape over the next two years of writing and recording. After Michael's death in 2016, Dame Esther Rantzen, founder of the ChildLine charity, revealed that he had secretly donated all of *Jesus To A Child*'s £50,000 royalties to them. She said: "George helped us to reach out to hundreds of thousands of children through his generosity. I met him a couple of times – he approached us, rather than us going cap in hand to him, but it was an intensely personal gift. He didn't want it to be known or to be part of his image." She told BBC News that "he really wanted to keep his help secret, it was an intensely personal gift. It meant we could answer more children."

As George dealt with the grief of losing Anselmo, he began a relationship with art dealer Kenny Goss that was to last 15 years. But within a week of meeting Kenny, he heard that his mother had health concerns, with skin cancer of the most virulent form. It went into remission for three or four months but came back with a vengeance, and a week later she was dead. The singer later explained that he suffered depression that far exceeded usual grief, a depression that would trigger his battles with addictions throughout the remainder of his life.

Older was released on 14 May 1996 to huge acclaim and enormous sales in the UK. Although, like *Listen...* it was greeted with a rather more lukewarm reception in the States, *Older* was a massive

Jesus To A Child **and** ***Fastlove*** **were successive UK No.1's in 1996 – George's best chart one-two since 1986**

An unrepentant George leaving his Beverly Hills home for the first time since his arrest, 1998

© MARK J. TERRILL/AP/REX/Shutterstock

© John Chapple/Getty Images

“SITTING DOWN AND SAYING ‘I AM GAY’ TO THE *DAILY MAIL* WOULD HAVE BEEN HARDER THAN ALL THE FLAK I TOOK”

GEORGE MICHAEL

George and Stevie Wonder perform Stevie's classic *Living For the City* at the 4th Annual VH1 Honors Show in Universal City, California in 1997

success on home soil and in Europe. In the UK, it premiered at No.1 selling more than 280,000 copies in its first week – one of the biggest debuts in British music history. With more than 1.8 million copies sold in the UK alone, it spent an astonishing 147 weeks in the Top 200, 99 of those in the Top 75. The six hit singles culled from the album over the next two years is a record that remains unsurpassed.

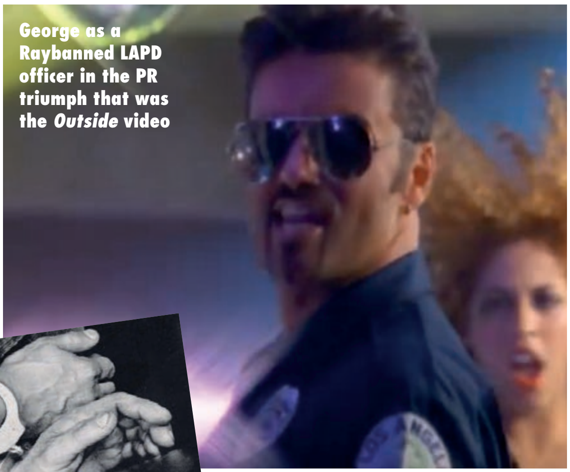
With George more than happy to be part of the promotional machine for the album and his new record companies, Virgin and US-based DreamWorks Records (it was the first release of the latter), he played a live show that was filmed for the *MTV Unplugged* series. It was recorded at Three Mills Studio in London on 11 October 1996, and his mother was in the audience. Tragically, it was to be the last time she would see George play live.

HUMAN NATURE

On the face of it, George was on top of the world, a second act in a career populated by numerous bumps in the road – but his private life was still dogged with depression and troubled episodes. His open relationship with Kenny Goss meant that George was still free to play the field, something that soon led him into trouble. On 7 April 1998, George was arrested for "engaging in a lewd act" in a public toilet at the Will Rogers Memorial Park in Beverley Hills. The singer had been the victim of a sting operation by local police. Michael explained in the *A Different Corner* documentary: "There were two guys that were, I think, part of that entrapment set-up going in and out of the bathroom and something in me said 'You shouldn't go in there. There's something really dodgy going on.' But I went."

After pleading no contest to the charge, Michael was fined $810 and sentenced to 80 hours of community service. For many artists, this news would have broken them and ruined their career, but George took it in his stride and dealt with the fall-out in remarkably candid fashion, opening up about his sexuality and offering no excuses for his behaviour. "Would there ever have been a day when I sat down and talked with someone from the *Daily Mail* or *Mail On Sunday* and said 'Yes, I am gay'. Would I have been able to do that? That probably would have been harder than all the flak I took!" he explained.

He totally diffused the situation with a superbly honest interview with Michael Parkinson in 1998. "To some degree, I was not in the best state of mind and it was a reckless thing to do," he told the chatshow legend. The wide-ranging interview touched on George's battles with depression, his realisation that he was gay rather than bisexual, and the



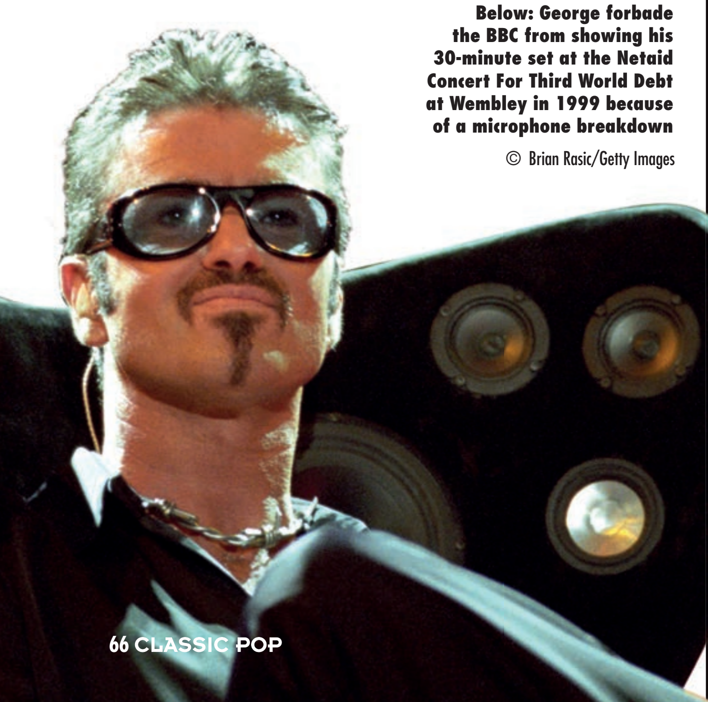
George as a Raybanned LAPD officer in the PR triumph that was the *Outside* video

faith he had in his audience that they would stand by him come what may. "I've always felt I have a very strong sense of my audience and I knew that they would not desert me if they found out I was gay. I believe in people more than that. If they get something rewarding from you emotionally such as music then they are tolerant of certain things – as well they should be."

Further hammering home the remarkable PR turnaround of the incident, George went on the front foot with the *Outside* single, a double-entendre-packed paean to sex in the open air that featured a controversial video satirising his arrest. The song made No.2 in the UK singles chart and was a Top 20 entry in multiple countries around the world.

George's final release of the 90s came just a fortnight before the end of the decade. *Songs From The Last Century* featured 10 covers including tracks by The Police and U2 side project Passengers alongside standards from the worlds of jazz, musicals and film. George explained: "I honestly wanted to stay afloat personally by having something to do which meant learning, progress, working with [producer] Phil Ramone, singing songs that would stretch my voice."

Once again, sales were strongest at home in the UK, but the album only reached a disappointing No.157 in the States, marking time during another lengthy hiatus in recording. It would be another four years before George Michael was to return with the knowingly-titled *Patience*. ■



Below: George forbade the BBC from showing his 30-minute set at the Netaid Concert For Third World Debt at Wembley in 1999 because of a microphone breakdown

© Brian Rasic/Getty Images

THE KEY RECORDINGS

TONGUE-IN-CHEEK WIT AND A GRANDSTANDING DUET: JUST TWO OF GEORGE'S BEST MOMENTS IN THE 90s

FREEDOM! '90

1990

Maybe this should have been the lead single from *Listen Without Prejudice Vol.1*, rather than the more sombre *Praying For Time*. Packed with lyrical zingers about George's life in Wham! ("What a kick, just a buddy and me") and newfound cynicism about the record business, this upbeat classic displays his ear for melody plus a more mature songwriting outlook. The David Fincher-directed video featuring Naomi Campbell, Linda Evangelista, Tatjana Patitz, Christy Turlington and Cindy Crawford would become one of the most iconic of the 90s. Endlessly quotable, George's wit shines throughout when dealing with his pop star reinvention ("When I knew which side my bread was buttered, I took the knife as well").

DON'T LET THE SUN GO DOWN ON ME

1991

With the *Listen Without Prejudice Vol.1* singles failing to set the world alight, George needed a hit – and he scored a No.1 in the UK and US, among other places, with this duet with Elton John. Originally recorded by Elton in 1974 for his *Caribou* album, the pair first revived it for Live Aid in 1985, and George regularly sang it on his Cover To Cover tour in 1991. The promo video was shot over several days, with the footage captured at George's rehearsal space, an aircraft hangar in Burbank, California. As with the *Too Funky* single, proceeds from this Grammy-nominated release went to charity, this time being spread across 10 different worthy causes.

TOO FUNKY

1992

When *Listen… Vol.2* was scrapped in the wake of the legal battle with Sony, George donated this cracking floor-filler to the *Red Hot + Dance* project to raise cash for AIDS awareness. The most-played song in Europe in 1992, the single went on to sell almost 170,000 copies in the UK alone. Michael nabbed a bit from Jocelyn Brown's 1984 R&B banger *Somebody Else's Guy* as well as Anne Bancroft dialogue from *The Graduate* – and closing words courtesy of actress Annie Leake from *The Radio Ham*, a classic episode of *Hancock*, featuring hangdog comedian Tony Hancock. The high-fashion-satirising promo boasts costumes by Thierry Mugler, plus Tyra Banks and a returning Linda Evangelista.

OUTSIDE

1998

If George's arrest at the Will Rogers Memorial Park in Beverly Hills was a personal low point, he dealt with the fallout in typically brave and witty fashion. *Outside* pokes fun at the incident brilliantly with a strings-laden disco reboot packed with double-entendres. Thumbing his nose at his critics ("I'd service the community, but I already have, you see"), the song came with an outrageous video which deliberately pushed the buttons of the naysayers, with George turning up in uniform at a loo-turned-club. The punchline of two male officers passionately kissing caused much controversy, and George was unsuccessfully sued for 'emotional distress' by one of the undercover cops who arrested him.

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CLASSIC ALBUM

LISTEN WITHOUT PREJUDICE VOL.1 GEORGE MICHAEL

REINVENTING THE IDEA OF 'DIFFICULT SECOND ALBUM SYNDROME', GEORGE MICHAEL'S MUCH-ANTICIPATED FOLLOW-UP TO *FAITH* ARRIVED WITH THE NEW DECADE TO BRING UNEASY LISTENING TO THE MASSES

STEVE HARNELL

The signs were there, of course, right from the Wham! days. After all, what was *Careless Whisper* if it wasn't a plea to be taken seriously away from the bachelor-centric fun of the band mothership?

Listen Without Prejudice Vol.1 – a provocative title that also hinted of further material already in the works – was a concerted attempt by George Michael to free himself of the shackles of pop superstardom. Introspective, at times mournful, mature, this was a powerful and ambitious collection from a serious-minded singer-songwriter at the peak of his powers.

Michael felt under siege – a prisoner of his fame as one of the most recognisable pop icons on the planet, and lambasted as a black music interloper. His two wins at the American Music Awards were controversial and unpopular in some sections of the black music community. If George felt that his hit-making powers had often brought him nothing but unhappiness and mental anguish, then *Listen Without Prejudice Vol.1* would see him set out an agenda for his own future, defiantly on his own terms. This was a kind of musical digging-in of heels that had rarely, if ever, been pulled off before by an artist of his stature.

Recorded at Sarm West and Metropolis Studios in London, the record – like *Faith* – would be entirely self-produced by the songwriter.

In the *Freedom* documentary, George explains: "Suddenly, I couldn't get

© Mick Hutson/Redferns

THE SONGS ▶▶

1 PRAYING FOR TIME
George's re-introduction as serious artist could not have been more different from *Faith* as he swaps sex and relationships for social commentary and political injustice on this Lennon-esque opener. So as to emphasise the message of the song, George chose to release a video containing only the song lyrics – which he improvised in the studio while recording.

2 FREEDOM! '90
Denouncing his pop star past and sex-symbol image, *Freedom '90* sees George implore his fans to look beyond the veneer of his fame and get to know the man behind the image. A danceable beat with an infectious piano riff and soulful chorus evokes the Happy Mondays' *Step On*. An *MTV Unplugged*-style rendition to celebrate the music channel's 10th birthday ranks among his greatest ever live performances.

3 THEY WON'T GO WHEN I GO
Proving his soul-boy credentials, George included this cover of his hero Stevie Wonder's *They Won't Go When I Go*, a track from 1974's *Fullfillingness' First Finale*, as a tribute to one of his greatest inspirations. Backed only by a lone piano and choir, George's version stayed faithful to Stevie's original.

4 SOMETHING TO SAVE
An acoustic song with gorgeous melody and fantastic vocal sees George back on more familiar ground lyrically, detailing the complexities of an indecisive relationship and whether it was worth pursuing. A choir elevates the track, proving to be a perfect accompaniment for George's blue-eyed soul.

5 COWBOYS AND ANGELS
One of the pinnacles of Michael's entire discography. A jazzy arrangement with epic strings, the *Cowboys And Angel*'s moody sonics perfectly capture the song's yearning lyric which details a three-way tale of unrequited love. A girl in love with George, who is in love with an unattainable man is the narrative which Michael later explained was based on his real-life relationship with Kathy Jeung (who appeared in the *I Want Your Sex* video) and photographer Brad Branson.

6 WAITING FOR THAT DAY
Based around the classic James Brown *Funky Drummer* track (one of the most utilised drum patterns in hip-hop), *Waiting For That Day* also manages to evoke the do-do-do's of Lou Reed's *Walk On The Wild Side* and The Rolling Stones' *You Can't Always Get What You Want* (the inclusion of the title of which earned Jagger and Richards a writing credit). Lyrically, the song sees its protagonist struggling to come to terms with a lost love.

7 MOTHER'S PRIDE
Another major highlight of *Listen Without Prejudice Vol.1*, *Mother's Pride* is a stunning, sombre ballad which recounts the story of a mother waving her son off as he goes to war. The subject matter saw the track gain traction and airplay in the United States during the Gulf War in 1991 due to its relevance to the life experiences of many. In later years, *Mother's Pride* has also been re-interpreted as a coded track about a mother's feelings upon discovering her son's homosexuality.

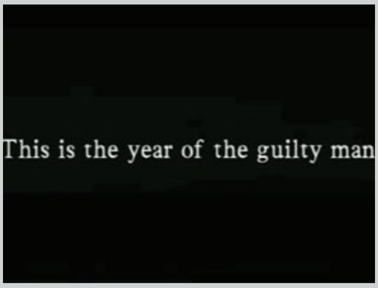
8 HEAL THE PAIN
Another of George's greatest inspirations were The Beatles and that is never more evident than on this irresistible pastiche of the Fab Four. A folky, acoustic track with layered melodies, *Heal The Pain*'s lyrics such as "Be good to yourself because nobody else has the power to make you happy" are thinly veiled pearls of wisdom pertaining to George's own personal situation. He later re-recorded the song as a duet with Paul McCartney.

9 SOUL FREE
Given the sombre vibe of much of the album, George planned a second volume which would be more upbeat tonally, focusing mainly on dance music. *Soul Free* is an obvious indicator of how that record would sound. Disappointing sales of the album in relation to *Faith* saw the follow-up shelved and finished tracks instead released on *Red Hot + Dance*, a charity album to benefit AIDS research.

10 WAITING (REPRISE)
A short but sweet closer, the ballad *Waiting (Reprise)* sees George struggling to come to terms his immense fame ("You look for your dreams in heaven, but what the hell are you supposed to do when they come true?"). Clocking in at just over two minutes, George closes the album by imploring "Is it too late to change? Here I am." **Mark Lindores**

Famous faces, burning symbols… but no George. "I'm going to kind of disappear," he told *Q* at the time of *Freedom! '90*

THE VIDEOS ▶▶



PRAYING FOR TIME
For some reason, George refused to appear in any of the promo videos for *Listen Without Prejudice Vol.1*, yet that decision allowed for its directors to instead cook up some innovative solutions. Nowadays, lyric videos are commonplace, but in 1990, *Praying For Time*'s Michael Borofsky-directed just-the-words clip was truly revolutionary.

FREEDOM '90
One of George Michael's most talked about videos, this David Fincher-directed clip features some of the decade's most era-defining supermodels, including Naomi Campbell, Linda Evangelista, Tatjana Patitz, Christy Turlington and Cindy Crawford. Again, no George, but the presence of so many top-tier pin-ups guaranteed this video a heck of a lot of MTV airtime.

HEAL THE PAIN
The first of *Listen Without Prejudice Vol.1*'s videos to actually feature George himself, the former Wham! singer still kept himself in the shadows (literally) for this sepia-coloured clip. Though released in 1990, its misty shots of billowing curtains, mirrors and beautiful women in various poses and looking wistfully out of windows feels very 80s.

> "IF YOU'RE GOING TO SAY, 'I'M NOT GOING TO APPEAR IN THE VIDEO', I'D SAY IT'S A FAIRLY GOOD CONSOLATION PRIZE. THE BURNING JACKET, THE EXPLODING GUITAR… IT WAS ME SAYING 'I'M SICK OF ALL THIS, I REALLY CAN'T COPE WITH IT.'"
>
> **GEORGE MICHAEL**

anywhere near black radio and that was really the reason why the record was called *Listen Without Prejudice*. It was me saying, 'Here's an album that has bits of gospel, R&B, some very white stuff. It was just trying to say, 'Let me be [all] of these things without having to be one or the other.'"

George's ever-present soul inspirations can still be heard on the LP, but new influences are also added to the mix, in particular the songcraft of Lennon and McCartney. For the duration of the writing and recording sessions, The Beatles' progressive *Revolver* and the sophisticated studio perfectionism of *Abbey Road* were constant touchstones.

If fans of Michael had any doubts that he was stretching out into a more adult direction then they vanished with the startlingly mature initial offering from the album, *Praying For Time*, his first release in almost two years and the opening gambit of the masterwork to follow. Universally admired, it was a remarkably incisive plea for social equality. James Hunter of *Rolling Stone* magazine described the song as "a distraught look at the world's astounding woundedness. Michael offers the healing passage of time as the only balm for physical and emotional hunger, poverty, hypocrisy and hatred."

Praying For Time was George's determined effort to write something with the anthemic and philosophical qualities of John Lennon's *Imagine*; he pulled it off with aplomb, far exceeding the overly simplistic spirituality of the former Beatle's most famous solo single.

If George's record company thought his new direction would be a difficult sell, the conflict between artist and label was further compounded by news that the singer would not appear in any of the videos for his new singles. In the record company's eyes, this was prima donna stubbornness taken to a whole new level. For George, it was the only way he could preserve his own sanity after the mentally exhausting promotional merry-go-round that had surrounded the whole *Faith* campaign.

Carefully sequenced, the jolting opener is followed by *Freedom! '90*, equally primed to prove a point. With an almost Italo house piano lead line, *Freedom! '90* was packed with some of George's smartest lyrics as he moved away from his former life as a pop pin-up. In just one verse he sums up his Wham!, *Faith* and new eras: "We won the race, got out of the place/ Went back home, got a brand new face for the boys on MTV/ But today the way I play the game has got to change, oh yeah/ Now I'm gonna get myself happy."

Its video – even without George – still managed to become iconic. Helmed by Fight Club director David Fincher, it featured the world's five most famous supermodels of the era – Naomi Campbell, Cindy Crawford, Linda Evangelista, Christy Turlington and Tatjana Patitz.

George was unrepentant about choosing to remain absent from the screen, later explaining: "If you're going to say to your record company, 'Look, I'm not going to appear in this video', then I would say that's a fairly good consolation prize. The burning jacket, the exploding guitar, the exploding jukebox… it was me just saying 'I'm sick of all this, I really can't cope with it.'"

George's rapid maturation into one of the most impressive white soul vocalists of his generation is best seen in the virtuoso cover of Stevie Wonder's mournful gospel ballad *They Won't Go When I Go*, which even manages to surpass the original. Speaking in the *Freedom* documentary, Wonder was effusive in his praise for it, adding: "At the end of the day, we come alone in this world and we will die alone. It's what we do in between that's going to determine how and what we'll be remembered as, and what we can think about in spirit. It was great to hear [George] sing this song."

Something To Save, an acoustic string-laden ballad was equally affecting; a plea for a relationship in trouble. At seven minutes plus, the jazzy shuffle of *Cowboys And Angels* proved that George was unafraid to stretch out in the studio and throw the radio-pleasing conventions of the three-minute pop song in the trash. But *Listen Without Prejudice Vo.1* isn't without its awareness of chart trends. *Waiting For That Day* jumped on the *Funky Drummer* sample bandwagon even if it turned the ebullience of the original rhythm into something more downbeat. Equally, *Mother's Pride* was downcast and maudlin. The track gained significant airplay in the US during the first Gulf War in 1991, with radio stations mixing tributes from callers to their fallen relatives with Michael's song of families torn apart by military conflict and damned to repeat the process, generation after generation.

If *Listen Without Prejudice Vo.1* can seem like the sound of a tortured artist struggling to find hope in a hopeless universe, then the balm of the Paul McCartney homage *Heal The Pain* takes some of the weight off the album's heavy shoulders. The reggae-tinged *Soul Free* lets in some sunshine at the tail end of the record, too, only for the tender acoustic ballad *Waiting (Reprise)* to anchor us to harsh reality once again.

A landmark record in Michael's back catalogue, after the populist staging post of Faith, his transition to fully-fledged grown-up solo artist was now complete.

POP ART

YOUNG GUNS GEORGE MICHAEL AND ANDREW RIDGELEY ARRIVED IN THE UK CHARTS IN 1982 WITH A FRESH SOUND AND IMAGE THAT STOOD APART YET BORROWED FROM MANY GENRES. IT DIDN'T QUITE FIT, IT WAS UNAPOLOGETICALLY POP… BUT THERE WAS AN INTELLIGENCE AND INTENT BEHIND THE SONGS – AND THE WAY THEY WERE PACKAGED. *CLASSIC POP* REVISITS THE SLEEVE ART FROM ACROSS WHAM! AND GEORGE MICHAEL'S CAREER

ANDREW DINELEY

Attention to detail was part of what made George Michael the consummate star he was. When Wham! first appeared, the charts were an eclectic realm of 'anything goes'. There was still a whiff of post-punk New Wave in the air, disco was clinging on for its life, and groundbreaking electronic-based acts were stepping out of the shadows, posturing their way onto bedroom walls across the land. Record labels heavily relied on the transformative powers of designers, and many of them forged new careers specifically in service to the music industry – a perfect pop symbiosis.

One design studio that appeared the same year as Wham! was XL Design, a small London operation with big ambitions. Tom Watkins, XL's founder, would eventually go on to establish his creative team as house design studio for ZTT Records, the label behind Frankie Goes To Hollywood et al, but their first sleeve design was for Wham!.

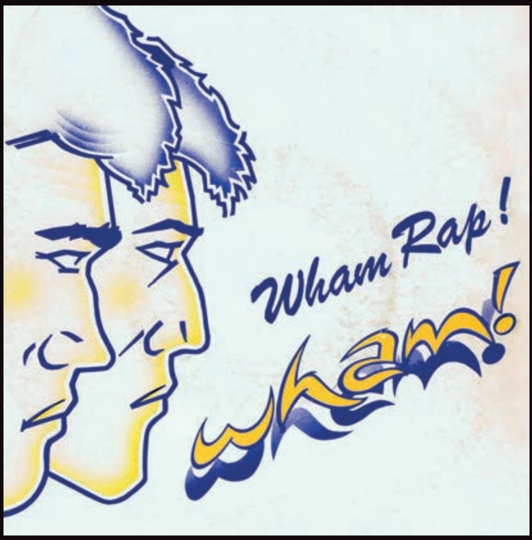
In his memoir *Let's Make Lots Of Money*, Watkins details his time working with the band. "We designed the original sleeve for their breakthrough *Wham! Rap* single. It was a line drawing of George and Andrew in profile that I traced from the contact sheet of a photo session. Then we layered 'exotic' typography on the sleeve that looked like it had been lifted straight from a Chinese takeaway menu." There is a naivety to this early two-colour sleeve design, but it's important to remember that whilst sound may have evolved in the 80s, the design industry was essentially still reliant on tools of the past.

The album that followed, entitled *Fantastic,* embraced photography, and fans were treated to a smouldering portrait of the duo taken by Chris Craymer. The image was considered so fit for purpose that another shot from the session was used for the single *Bad Boys*, albeit in black and white. A full-colour third image from the session was reserved for the rare vinyl picture disc.

"I MET GEORGE TO HEAR THE PLAYBACK OF *WAKE ME UP BEFORE YOU GO-GO*. THIS 20-YEAR-OLD TELLS ME HE'S WRITTEN, ARRANGED AND PRODUCED IT. I THOUGHT, THIS GUY IS FANTASTIC. IT MAY BE POPULIST, BUT IT'S BRILLIANT. I CAN'T BE SNOBBISH AND AVANT-GARDE IN FRONT OF THAT"

PETER SAVILLE

The 'back to back' *Fantastic* photo, the *Bad Boys* picture disc and the regular *Bad Boys* single sleeve all came from a Chris Craymer shoot after one look was rejected – and another lost in a taxi



Strange beginnings: the design for Wham!'s first single, featuring a none-too-flattering line drawing and "Chinese takeaway menu" lettering (right)

Rob O'Connor's Stylorouge design studio was already well established by the time *Bad Boys* was released in 1983, and this would prove to be the first of many his studio would work on with George Michael over the years. The cover image is a great example of necessity being the mother of invention, as a series of unfortunate events led to its final design – which O'Connor can now look back on with a smile.

"It's such a simple cover but it took a long time," he recalls. "In fact, we did it three times. The first shoot was of George and Andrew escaping down an alleyway, looking like bad boys. It was a bit like that opening scene in *Trainspotting,* actually. We used images, but George and Andrew didn't like them – so we did a reshoot with Eric Watson of them dressed as leather boys.

"It looked good, but Eric left the whole photoshoot in a taxi when he was bringing them over to me. All we had left were the clip tests – and as much as we tried, it never really worked. So in the end we used a shot from a third session with Chris Craymer… and that was what became that iconic image of them leaning back to back."

With a new recording contract, Wham!'s 1984 sophomore album *Make It Big* couldn't have been more aptly titled. Now a household name with an international audience and a fuller sound, the sleeve design brought a new level of sophistication – in the UK, at least.

Peter Saville's design studio PSA accepted creative duties, despite being better known for design work with artists from Factory Records and bands possibly considered more experimental. For Wham!, Saville's studio dispensed with excess design, presenting the duo via a Tony McGee portrait shot.

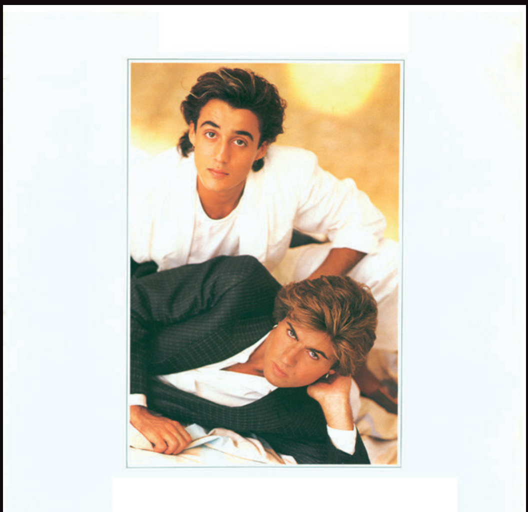
This time all the typography was reserved for the back sleeve, rendered neo-classically with an elegantly centred, upper case, serif typeface in black on white. Inexplicably, the sleeve was redesigned for the US market using an image from the same photo session, but the white space was removed and a bold yet bland typeface in cyan and magenta now sadly dates the design in ways not applicable to the UK original.

For some, it may have seemed odd that Peter Saville would choose to work with such a commercial outfit as Wham! but he rightly had no qualms, recognising George Michael as a credible artist long before it was fashionable to do so. In his book *Designed By Peter Saville,* the designer elaborates on his admiration for the man. "George Michael made the music that George Michael loved," he points out. "He just happened to be archetypal of millions. I went to meet him at Basing Street Studio off Portobello, and I can hear the playback of *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go,* which as a pop song is massive. This 20-year-old, who I thought was a performer, tells me that he's written, arranged and produced it. I thought,

NOT SO FANTASTIC

INNERVISION SQUEEZE THE PIPS

At the end of 1983, what remains a troubled curio in the Wham! catalogue appeared with a sleeve that's a great example of formulaic 80s-style graphic design by Shoot That Tiger! Visually, its design also provided clues that the Club Fantastic Megamix wasn't an authentic release. It was an effort by Innervision, Wham!'s record label at the time, to cash in on the duo's popularity, just in time for Christmas. The mix segued three tracks from the *Fantastic* album: *A Ray Of Sunshine, Come On* and their cover version of The Miracles' *Love Machine* from 1975. The single arrived three months after Wham! had become embroiled in legal proceedings with their label, leading to George and Andrew publicly denouncing the release. In *Smash Hits* magazine at the time, George didn't hold back: "We don't approve of it and we don't feel that we can recommend that anybody should buy it. We could be very unhappy to think that any of our fans might waste their money on it... I just hope the radio don't play it. It would be so irritating to hear something you think is so bad." Whether the radio played it or not, the single still managed to make it to No.15 in the charts.



Right: The original and rather classy *Make It Big* album cover with no front typography. Below: the inferior spelling-it-out US version, and the 'eyeshadow girl' design for *Wake Me Up...* by Peter Saville, based on a photograph by Trevor Key

'This guy is fantastic'. It may be populist, but it's brilliant. And I can't be snobbish and avant-garde in front of that."

Peter Saville's relationship with Wham! lasted for several singles and would eventually extend into George Michael's solo career. For *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go*, Saville proved that even he wasn't immune to channelling the zeitgeist, with a design that now looks very much a product of its time. Interestingly, he – with the assistance of acclaimed photographer Trevor Key – devised a sleeve that didn't depict the duo themselves, an unusual move for a single that was the epitome of pop from a band that were now the very definition of pin-up poster boys. For the follow-up singles *Everything She Wants* and *Last Christmas*, more refined design stylings were revisited with full bleed photography and classic Saville back cover typography.

These two singles illustrated two very different sides of Wham!: *Everything She Wants*, with its Martyn Goddard portrait, showed the duo as plaintive, serious artists; in contrast, *Last Christmas* cast them as jokers. The limited edition gatefold single took the joke even further and included another photograph from the same session, with Ridgeley the red-nosed reindeer cruelly slaughtered and lying supine in the snow with his festive comrade George, dressed as Father Christmas, wailing at his side – a reference to the press speculation that Wham!'s days were numbered. The supporting text pushed the message home: "But all good things must come to an end, and countless 'WHAM! SPLIT' stories are realised as 'Rudolph' Ridgeley is struck down by a rabid *NME* husky".

Peter Saville Associates would continue to work with Wham! until the end with their final singles. *I'm Your Man* heralded a step toward design minimalism, with its flat metallic silver and spectral gradient edging. This reductive approach was even more in evidence with the design for *The Edge Of Heaven*, where everything was discarded bar the Wham! logo placed against a two-tone blue gradient.

Peter Saville's studio had designed the cover of George Michael's debut solo single *Careless Whisper* in 1984, so it made sense that he stay on board for the first single following the announcement of the Wham! split in 1986. *A Different Corner* saw George Michael returning in a more contemplative mood, and this was reflected in the sombre design. The single was a minimal masterpiece, and its black and white Trevor Key photograph complemented it perfectly. The sleeve gave little away, allowing the song to speak for itself, with just one short line of text obliquely hinting at its origins – "This record is dedicated to a memory".

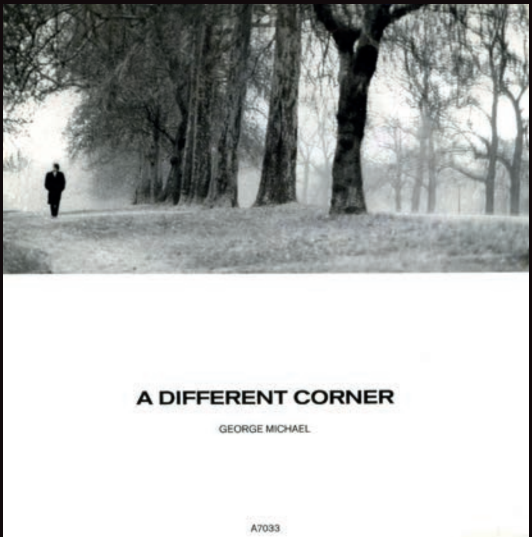
1986 also saw the release of George Michael's debut album *Faith*, and any residual accusations of George as a teeny-bop idol were quickly discarded by critics upon hearing his new direction. Meticulous attention to detail had been applied to every aspect of the project. George oversaw almost everything about *Faith*, way beyond song composition, and this naturally applied to the design of the album's sleeve. For this he collaborated once again with Stylorouge's Rob O'Connor, who remembers the process fondly.

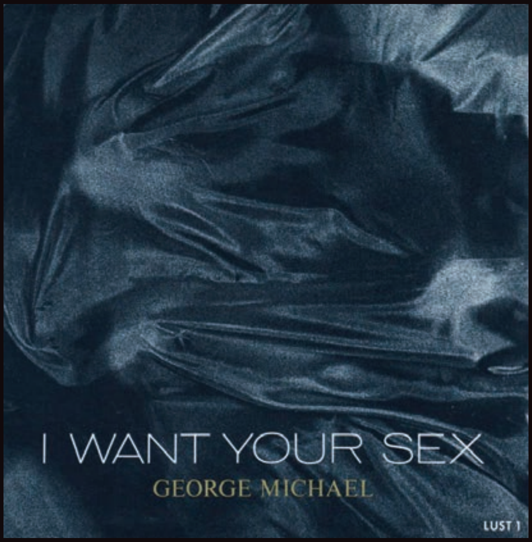
"George was always really hands-on when I worked with him on the *Faith* album," O'Connor emphasises. "He would mark up the photographs to show what he wanted to be retouched. We also designed dozens of different icons for the sleeve, then he came in one day and said, 'I've been working on this myself, and these are the five I like'. For him they represented faith, music, money, fame and love."

Wham! ended their career on a high with a series of sold-out concerts in China. "One of the many reasons the Chinese chose Wham! and not other groups who've asked was because of what we represent: optimism and aspiration," George remarked. "Also, we're at the opposite end of the scale to what China sees as the decadent rock acts of the West. You know – sex, drugs, scandal... they want a group who, I suppose, have a clean reputation."

Any wholesome image aspirations were summarily abandoned with the release of one of the more controversial singles from the *Faith* album. The promotional video for *I Want Your Sex* showed George romping around on satin sheets with make-up artist Kathy Jeung, a scenario that would be replicated on the single's cover. Unusually, the single image came first and was the inspiration for the video. George had seen the picture, taken by James Wedge, and liked it so much that he contacted the photographer to purchase the image for use on the sleeve. Who it is under the sheets was a secret at the time... and according to Wedge, it remains a secret to this very day.

For the next couple of singles from *Faith*, *Father Figure* and the album's title track, George returned again to the album's design team Stylorouge for





Left: Minimal design based around Trevor Key's black and white photo for *A Different Corner* and James Wedge's satin sheets used for *I Want Your Sex*

Below: The simple yet classy *I'm Your Man* design, the wistful *Everything She Wants* portrait, 'Rudolph' Ridgeley for *Last Christmas*, and the new, serious George on *Careless Whisper*

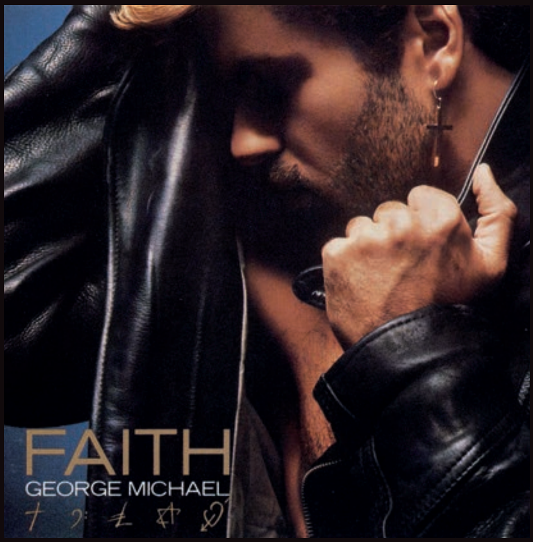
Rock photographer Martyn Goddard took the picture of George wailing over Andrew's stricken body for *Last Christmas*

creative support. These sleeves put the artist up front, with some striking portraiture by Brian Aris and Chris Cuffaro respectively. Both photographers were highly regarded in their fields, with impressive pop portfolios. George Michael was clearly on a mission to work with only the best in the industry and was now seemingly confident about fronting his own record sleeves again. Or was he?

In a creative volte-face, the final three singles released from the album returned to pure typography and resulted in some of the most minimal designs of his entire career. *Monkey* set the tone with its simple black on white, and George had a hand in this – as Norman Moore, the sleeve's designer, would attest. "As I recall, our first meeting to discuss the cover was in his dressing room at the music video shoot on a sound stage somewhere," Moore says. "He was very charming and respectful of the design process. I'm fairly sure it was George's idea to put the photograph on the back and just have the title type on the front. I had the title

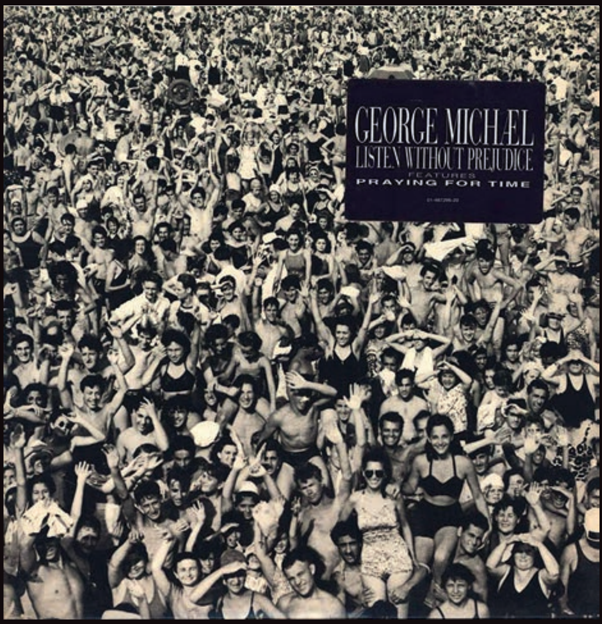
"WE DESIGNED DOZENS OF ICONS FOR THE *FAITH* SLEEVE, THEN GEORGE CAME IN ONE DAY AND SAID, 'I'VE BEEN WORKING ON THIS MYSELF AND THESE ARE THE FIVE I LIKE'. FOR HIM THEY REPRESENTED FAITH, MUSIC, MONEY, FAME AND LOVE"

ROB O'CONNOR



Pure typographic sleeves were chosen for *Monkey*, designed by Norman Moore, and *Kissing A Fool* and *Praying For Time*, both conceived by George working with Simon Halfon

Above: In the *Faith* era, George worked with Stylorouge and several photographers, resulting in some intense and striking sleeve portraiture



Right: *Listen Without Prejudice* shot by noir/crime photographer Weegee, who danced and shouted in order to get the Coney Island crowd's attention

typeset very small, then Xeroxed it to make it distressed-looking, and enlarged it with a photostat machine. George really liked the effect and the simple black on white, but asked if I could add an accent over the 'e'. If there was a reason for the accent, I have forgotten it. It may just have been an aesthetic affectation… why not?"

By 1990 George's status as a mature artist was being reflected in the design work, all created with Simon Halfon. With *Praying For Time*, Halfon and Michael received a co-credit for a style that followed on from previous singles, *One More Try* and *Kissing A Fool*, with a restrained, purely typographic aesthetic. The album *Listen Without Prejudice Vol. 1* would, however, take another different direction. Its cover image featured a cropped section of a 1942 photograph titled *Crowd At Coney Island* by Arthur Fellig, a noted US press photographer who worked under the pseudonym of Weegee.

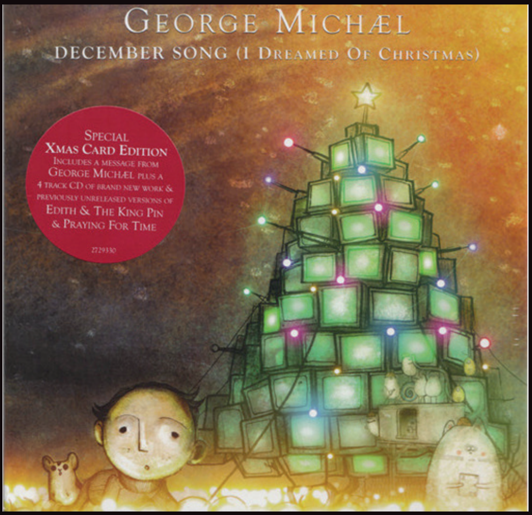
Simon Halfon worked closely with George Michael during this period. "I had known George since the Wham! days and first started working with him on the *Listen Without Prejudice* album cover," Halfon said. "There were some big shoes to fill, following in the footsteps of great designers.

"*Listen Without Prejudice* is such a simple sleeve that it still stands the test of time – and if I had to pick one piece of work that was a personal favourite, it would be this. The single sleeves were just photographs by Russell Young with no typography on the front, definitely inspired by Peter Saville. George and I worked together on and off after that time, including on *Symphonica*."

By 1998, George was out, proud and loud, and his single *Outside* famously became his way of making light of an incident that could easily have seen the end of his career. In many ways it was a song of sexual liberation, with a subtle pastoral cover design that contrasted the themes inherent in the song's lyrics. The single was included on his *Ladies & Gentlemen* best-of album that same year – another not-so-subtle lavatorial reference.

During this period George worked closely with graphic designer Greg Jakobek, who began working with George on the 1996 single *Fastlove*. "At that time I had moved my studio to his offices in Highgate, not only to work on his releases but also for other artists he'd signed to his newly-formed record company, called Aegean," says Jakobek.

"George really was very hands-on, especially at the beginning, but over the years he became less so. I worked on a lot of singles for George, including *Outside*, which was great. We sourced a photo from Magnum – we had a large selection of beautiful gritty



Above: 2009's *December Song* with design (and video) by M-I-E, and George's 2014 live album *Symphonica*, another unfussy design made in collaboration with Simon Halfon

photos of convicts and arrestees, and we used a close crop of one of these. Some people believed it was George, but it wasn't. There was an alternative idea of just having a shot of some silver Gucci handcuffs – yes, there is such a thing! – but it didn't look great.

"One of my fondest memories was flying to the recording studio in New York when George was working on *Songs From The Last Century*. The sleeve was designed on a laptop in the recording studio over a weekend, with George passing comments between vocals. We used some great photographs by Andrew MacPherson. I'm also really proud of the design work for the *Patience* album and its singles *Flawless* and *Amazing* from 2004."

An illustrative approach is sometimes the perfect solution for a record cover design, and George Michael wasn't averse to embracing this approach where appropriate. For his 2002 single *Freeek!* he worked with acclaimed comic book artist Stephen Platt, who devised a series of fetishistic costumes for use in the song's promotional video and images for its sleeves. He also worked with M-I-E animation studios in 2008 on the video and sleeve for his Christmas single *December Song*, and M-I-E created a beautifully poignant package for the campaign.

Fans will no doubt have their own favourite Wham! and George Michael sleeve designs, but the diversity of styles, collaborators and themes that he chose to employ during his career are testament to a creative vision and a fearless self-confidence that were in evidence from the start to the end.

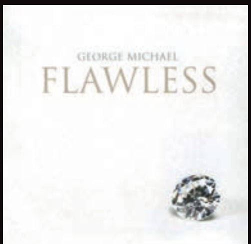
TAKING IT TO THE CLUBS

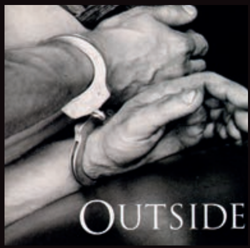
POURING HIS SOUL INTO AIDS AWARENESS

The six relatively fallow years that followed the release of *Listen Without Prejudice* in 1990 were largely due to George finding himself in another record label legal dispute. During this period he dedicated his creativity to many philanthropic causes. The Red Hot charity was very close to his heart; it has raised millions for HIV/AIDS awareness, research and relief, and in 1992 George was instrumental in bringing the Red Hot + Dance album to fruition, providing three brand new songs to the compilation that were originally written for his aborted *Listen Without Prejudice Vol. 2* album. The CD was accompanied by a documentary, shown on MTV.

Rob O'Connor from Stylorouge remembers working on the sleeve design in 1992. "George effectively put the cover together at our studio," he explains. "We acted as designer/artworkers, really. I believe he was involved in curating the tracklisting and he was instrumental in procuring the use of the Keith Haring cover image, and even selected the typestyle for the title treatment."

The single *Too Funky* trailed the release of the album and went on to become a worldwide smash, with its sleeve showing George with his new short haircut, almost hiding in the shadows against a bright white background – another creative collaboration between Simon Halfon and photographer Russell Young.





Above: Jakobek's work on *Patience* and its singles *Amazing* and *Flawless*, *Freeek!* by L.A. comic book artist Stephen Platt, plus two differing presentations of the *Outside* concept

CLASSIC ALBUM

OLDER
GEORGE MICHAEL

WORKING THROUGH THE GRIEF OF LOSING HIS PARTNER, GEORGE EMERGES FROM A SELF-IMPOSED PERIOD OF SONGWRITING SILENCE WITH A POIGNANT MASTERPIECE LACED WITH HOPE…

STEVE HARNELL

It took George Michael more than half a decade to release the follow-up to *Listen Without Prejudice Vol. 1*, but spurred on by personal tragedy and a dogged defiance, he created his finest work – the expansive third solo album, *Older*.

George himself sees the record as his most artistically accomplished, and, in his homeland, it became the most commercially successful of his career – a record-breaking six singles reached the Top 3 across a two-year span.

Older was released on 14 May 1996, three days after the Knebworth feeding frenzy that saw Oasis sell 250,000 tickets in the blink of an eye. Britpop was at its peak, but George was in no mood to hang on to the coattails of this Anglocentric revisionist movement. Typically, he stuck to his guns, and *Older*'s reference points remained his trademark touchstones of soul, R&B and pop, only this time often given a jazzier twist.

Although Michael deftly weaved in synthesized electronic touches to the up-tempo tracks and the stripped-back minimalism of *It Doesn't Really Matter*, the overall ambience of *Older* is of a more organic record, featuring splashes of brass and occasional string arrangements. One of the major musical inspirations – *Older* is dedicated to him in the liner notes – is Brazilian composer Antônio Carlos Jobim, credited with bringing bossa nova to the masses and the man behind the iconic hit *The Girl From Ipanema*.

Even more fundamental to the genesis of the eventual record thematically is George's late partner Anselmo Feleppa, who died in 1993. *Jesus To A Child*, the almost unbearably poignant ballad that opens the album, served as the first of many tributes to Anselmo on *Older*. Within a week of writing it, George was singing it in front of the Brandenburg Gate at the MTV Europe Music Awards

"FOR ANYONE WHO HAD A CLUE ABOUT SYMBOLISM, I WAS COMING OUT. *FASTLOVE* MAKES ME LAUGH BECAUSE IT'S ALL ABOUT CRUISING AND COVERING MY PAIN, BLUNTING OUT THAT PAIN WITH FAST LOVE, SIMPLE AS THAT."

GEORGE MICHAEL

in November 1994. "I wrote the best, most healing piece of music. It was all systems go from that moment on," Michael revealed.

In the *Freedom* documentary the singer added: "The whole experience of losing Anselmo, the period of grief, roughly two years where I didn't write a note of music [came before] the absolute knowledge that the next album I was going to write would be about grief and recovery. *Older* is my greatest moment.

"I sat at a keyboard and played a very simple string part, stream of consciousness rubbish comes out of my head, then I sang 'like Jesus to a child' and I thought 'Oh my God, that's him [Anselmo] and me'. I was so excited that I finally had been able to put my feelings about Anselmo into words."

Returning to Sarm West Studios where he cut *Listen Without Prejudice Vol. 1*, this time George had Jon Douglas on board to share production duties on three tracks. Douglas had a background in soul and R&B, having already worked with Eternal, Gabrielle and Pauline Henry (he'd later be behind hits for Louise Redknapp and team up with Sugababes, Kylie and All Saints, alongside further collaborations with George). Douglas first met the singer in 1995 while producing Lisa Moorish's cover of the Wham! classic *I'm Your Man*. Michael provided backing vocals and the pair immediately hit it off.

Themes of grief, recovery and mortality are threaded throughout *Older*'s 11 tracks. The finely-honed collection came together slowly, with Michael spending three years working on the new material.

It's arguably the most diverse LP of his career. After the elegant opening ballad comes the upbeat, dancefloor-friendly *Fastlove*, which explores the theme of using promiscuous sex as escapism. Meanwhile, *Spinning The Wheel* flips the theme of promiscuity to warn of its danger in an era where the spectre of HIV and AIDS remained a major concern.

"For anyone who had a clue about symbolism, I was coming out," George later explained. "*Fastlove* makes me laugh because it's all about cruising and covering my pain, blunting out that pain with fast love, simple as that. There's not one track that's not about Anselmo or the risk of AIDS [for example, *Spinning The Wheel*]."

THE SONGS

1 JESUS TO A CHILD
The predominant influence on *Older* is George's partner Anselmo Feleppa who had died prior to the album's release and is immortalised in this lilting, bossa nova-flavoured opener. After a period of debilitating grief and writer's block, *Jesus To A Child* was the first song George had written in two years. It gave him his first solo No.1 single in a decade.

2 FASTLOVE
Although George hadn't spoken publicly about his homosexuality at this point, he later revealed that *Older* was littered with confessions and clues to his fans without making a public declaration ('Baby, can't you read the signs,' he sings). *Fastlove*, a funky groove based around a sample of Patrice Rushen's *Forget Me Nots*, is one of the most blatant with its lyric being a direct confession to cruising and no-strings sex.

3 OLDER
A moody, contemplative ballad, *Older's* title track is about moving on and maturing (despite being only 32 years old!), 'Change is a stranger you have to know', George sings. Released as the album's fourth single, it was partnered with a stunning cover of Bonnie Raitt's *I Can't Make You Love Me* from George's *MTV Unplugged* set ensuring another Top 3 single – one of the record-breaking seven the album produced.

4 SPINNING THAT WHEEL
A stunning fusion of jazz and trip-hop, *Spinning That Wheel*'s sinister undertones perfectly capture the song's cautious lyric from the viewpoint of a fearful partner reprimanding a reckless lover who is endangering both of their lives with their promiscuity. As the spectre of AIDS looms, it is the dark flip-side to *Fastlove's* carefree attitude.

5 IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER
Reminiscent of some of Stevie Wonder's 70s tender ballads, *It Doesn't Really Matter* is based on a smooth moody groove. As he had proved repeatedly with some of his finest ballads, George possessed an incredible knack for penning songs with a maturity way beyond his years and this is no exception.

6 THE STRANGEST THING
Themes of despair and devastation are never far from the surface of much of the album (as well as the loss of Anselmo, George's beloved mother was battling cancer during its creation) and are rarely more visceral than on *The Strangest Thing* where George pleads for solace. "Take my hand; Lead me to some peaceful land that I cannot find inside my head", he begs over a spacy The Orb-like soundscape.

7 TO BE FORGIVEN
While Anselmo was the greatest influence on the lyrical content of *Older*, the influence of Brazilian composer Antônio Carlos Jobim, who had died in 1994, loomed large over the album sonically. *To Be Forgiven*, a Bacharach-flavoured ballad is one of the most blatant examples of his influence.

8 MOVE ON
A note of optimism, *Move On* sees George attempt to come back from heartbreak. Musically, the song explores a more traditional jazz supper club sound which indicates where he was headed next musically with his interpretations of standards on *Songs From The Last Century*.

9 STAR PEOPLE
Holding up a mirror to the toxic nature of celebrity culture and shallowness of fame, *Star People* is a biting examination of the unfulfillment and inadequacy that fuels the ruthless pursuit of fame with taunts of "Maybe your mama didn't love you enough" and "How much is enough?". A funkier remix was released as a single in 1997 resulting in a far superior version.

10 YOU HAVE BEEN LOVED
Love, loss and longing result in a loving lament to Anselmo told from the viewpoint of his devastated mother. The beautiful tribute is one of the highlights of the album. The tender, sombre song reflected the mood of the country in the late summer of 1997, and *You Have Been Loved* was a big hit in the aftermath of the death of Princess Diana.

11 FREE
With a brooding trip-hop beat, sweeping strings, jazzy accents and a snippet of *The Strangest Thing*, *Free* is a two-minute distillation of the album. A single lyric, George whispering "It feels good to be free" ends the album on a positive note suggesting he has processed his grief and is optimistic for the future. **Mark Lindores**

THE VIDEOS ▶▶

JESUS TO A CHILD

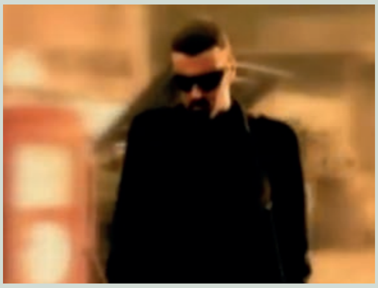
George's devastating tribute to his late partner, Anselmo Feleppa, is packed full of imagery of grief and loss. Allusions to solitude abound in the promo, and the pain in his eyes is clear for all to see. Although this introspective ballad was an unorthodox lead single for *Older*, its importance in Michael's back catalogue cannot be overstated. A No.1 in the UK, it set the success of its parent album in motion.

FASTLOVE

A sinisterly-lit George holds court in a speaker-packed chair with a remote in hand as he flips through various exotically-garbed virtual reality-style sex partners, both male and female. The 'Fony' legend written on the side of his headphones is a knowing nod to his major label contract dispute. The rainstorm sequence sees George reinstate his trademark Wham! clap, looking cool amid the downpour.

SPINNING THE WHEEL

Like *Fastlove*, this quintessential 90s vid was helmed by Vaughan Arnell and Anthea Benton. Ditching *Fastlove*'s futurism, *Spinning The Wheel* opts for moody black and white, making full use of the song's jazzy inspiration – we could be in a pre-war Harlem club. Perched behind a keyboard, George is on finger-snapping form for this subtle warning against unprotected sex.



OLDER

With regular videographer Andy Morahan back behind the lens, this was a stately affair set in dusty, sun-drenched countryside. Featuring George shot in focus against blurry backgrounds, a sense of dislocation seeps through. A Top 3 for the 7" in the UK cemented *Older*'s position as his most commercially successful album and string of singles of his career on home soil.

Performing *Star People* at the MTV Europe Music Awards at Alexandra Palace, 1996

© Richard Young/REX/Shutterstock

"I SAT AT A KEYBOARD AND PLAYED A SIMPLE STRING PART, THEN I SANG 'LIKE JESUS TO A CHILD' AND THOUGHT, 'OH MY GOD, THAT'S HIM AND ME'. I WAS SO EXCITED I HAD FINALLY BEEN ABLE TO PUT MY FEELINGS INTO WORDS."

GEORGE MICHAEL

For a six-month period while he was recording *Older*, George felt in reasonable spirits but then discovered that his mother had been diagnosed with cancer. She died of the disease in February 1997. Indeed, as George worked through his grief for Anselmo and worry about the health of his mother, the tone of the LP veered between searing insights into loss and devastation and a defiant sense of hope. The bare-bones *It Doesn't Really Matter* – just a beatbox, simple keyboard and a few piano flourishes – leaves George's vocal space to breathe on a song that seems measured and philosophical about a relationship that's now in the past.

But the songwriter's torture is never too far from the surface. The world music vibe of *The Strangest Thing* inhabits a track shot through with pain where "time has been twisting the knife". George's heart-on-the-sleeve lyric adds: "Take my hand; Lead me to some peaceful land that I cannot find inside my head". The wistful Burt Bacharach and Antônio Carlos Jobim-influenced *To Be Forgiven* is similarly pained ("Save me from myself").

But *Older*'s story can't be summarised as one-note wallowing in self-pity – Michael's a far more rounded songwriter than that. *Move On* is a wonderful anthem of hope, with deft supper club atmospherics added to underpin the track's jazzy arrangement. Self-aware it may be, but this is no simplistic self-help manual. Michael's nuanced lyrics would provide a balm for many people suffering grief in the years that have followed.

There's spirit, too, in the confrontational *Star People*, where George distances himself from the showbiz pack, musing that their desperate search for fame and approbation comes from a need to fill the hole of an unhappy childhood.

The heart-breaking *You Have Been Loved* – once again written as a tribute to Anselmo – is a desolate ballad of loss and a return to the idea of an unloving God touched upon in the previous album's *Praying For Time*. An ode to humanism in a cruel world, its tone is measured – a songwriter at last at peace with the traumas that have befallen him.

Free, the sweeping cinematic instrumental with nods to trip-hop that closes out the album, draws the curtain on an emotional epic. "Feels good… to be free", George whispers quietly at the end. His art had brought him to a place of peace… at least for the time being. ■

Snapped outside the stars' hangout of the glitzy Spago restaurant in Beverly Hills, California, August 1997

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GEORGE MICHAEL & WHAM!

TOP 40 SINGLES

FROM JOYOUSLY IRRESISTIBLE FINGER-CLICKING POP TO STUNNINGLY-PRODUCED REFLECTIONS ON LIFE, LOVE AND LOSS, *CLASSIC POP* ATTEMPTS TO COMPRESS THE BREADTH OF GEORGE MICHAEL'S DUO-TO-SOLO CAREER INTO THE TIME-HONOURED TOP 40 FORMAT…

IAN WADE

You'd have thought a career spanning over 40 years might have been chockablock with hits, George Michael being one of those universally loved names with a clutch of songs that rank among the finest of the last few decades, yet it's surprisingly slim.

Official Wham! LPs offer up no more than two dozen songs in a laser-precision career, half of which were Top 5 hits, four of them No.1s. And that eventually became five when *Last Christmas* finally made the top spot in 2021 – and has been back there another two occasions since.

Even as a solo turn, five studio albums, each with at least 70 per cent of their contents released as a single in one form or another. Of course, there are numerous one-offs, charity projects and collaborations – both credited and uncredited. Yes, he could have pulled his finger out and left us with more, but what remains is a legacy of few missteps.

Here, we focus on singles, ideally official releases during his lifetime, and not some grotty, opportunist fan-fleecing exercise (we're looking at YOU, *Club Fantastic Megamix*). It was a tough list to narrow down and a couple of inclusions may raise eyebrows – and hopefully some exclusions won't prompt any riots either – but it's commiserations to the runner-ups, such as his version of Rufus Wainwright's *Going To A Town*, spare singles such as *Waiting For That Day* and *Star People*, and Wham! nuggets like *A Ray Of Sunshine* and *Where Did Your Heart Go?*

The inevitable bangers are all present, as are lesser singles that indicate where he was on his artistic path. Over a quarter of the chart is taken up by UK No.1s too and some songs you thought may have been massive at the time but actually weren't.

Anyway, settle in for a voyage of a man who wanted to be famous, did so, and then wasn't wild about it. A catalogue of iconic singles that have raised millions for charities since 1991. Songs about life on the dole, Club 18-30 holidays and the Iraq War; heartbreaking ballads about bad lovers and lost loves; fruity bangers about coming out, going out and being yourself; that one about a lousy Christmas. And there's a fair bit of sex, too, be it monogamous, no strings attached, cyber, or illicit outdoor shenanigans…

40

SHOOT THE DOG

POLYDOR 2002

Built around a sample of The Human League's classic *Love Action (I Believe In Love)*, *Shoot The Dog* saw George back in protest mode against then Prime Minister Tony Blair and his relationship with US President George W Bush, especially in the wake of the Iraq conflict. Along with an animated video by 2DTV, it didn't go down well, with Michael facing a barrage of hostility. As he explained to Trevor McDonald: "I'm not stupid – I knew I was going to walk into a wall of criticism because these are very reactionary times, but they're also very urgent times and I felt that I had to do this."

39

WHITE LIGHT

AEGEAN/ISLAND 2012

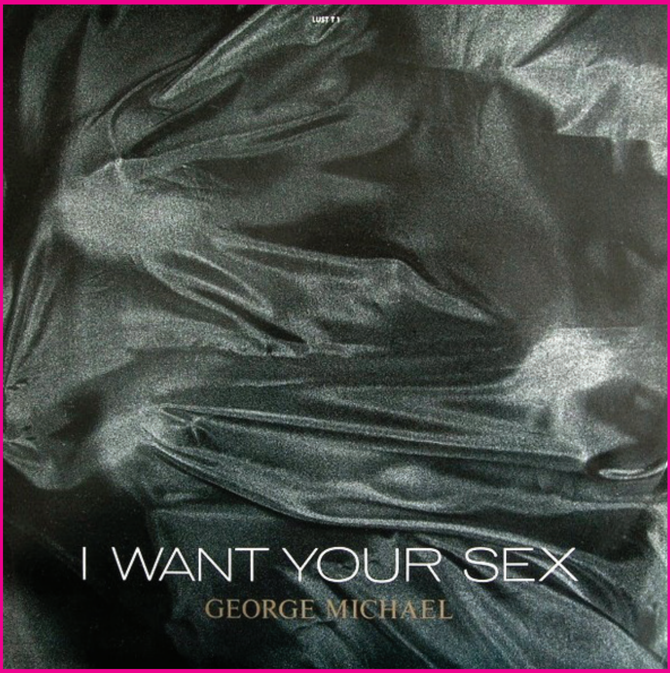
Released on the 30th anniversary of his first hit, *White Light* is probably better known as the other song he performed at the closing ceremony of the London 2012 Olympics, his first live engagement since illness. Having got the crowd going with *Freedom 90*, he then debuted *White Light*. Responding to criticism that he used the event to plug new material, Michael said: "It was my one chance on TV to thank you all for your loyalty and prayers, and I took it. And I don't regret it." The promo vid starred Kate Moss: "I wasn't in the *Freedom* video – I just missed it," she said, "That would have been amazing."

38

TRUE FAITH

AEGEAN/BBC 2011

Back when Twitter wasn't a binfire, there was much excitement when George joined the service, and somehow initially struggled to get to grips with its ways, even prompting some tips from Rachel Roberts in *The Guardian*. When it was announced that George had covered New Order's *True Faith* for Comic Relief, he was very pro-active tweet-wise urging fans to buy it and when they actually heard it, they thought it was slightly odd. George did however steal the fundraising show when he appeared with James Corden in a specially filmed sketch, where the duo have to 'save Comic Relief', which inspired Corden's *Carpool Karaoke* concept.



34

I WANT YOUR SEX

EPIC 1987

It's strange to conceive now the rumpus that this ode to rumpo caused when first released. Michael issued a statement in response to a BBC ban: "The media has divided love and sex incredibly. The emphasis of the AIDS campaign has been on safe sex, but the campaign has missed relationships… *I Want Your Sex* is about attaching lust to love, not just to strangers." The video saw him and girlfriend Kathy Yeung mostly naked, at one point George writing 'Explore Monogamy' on her with lipstick.

33

SPINNING THE WHEEL

VIRGIN 1996

It's easy with the benefit of hindsight to believe that George's music was full of gay longing, but having skirted around and dallied with the subject for years, *Older* was possibly George's first LP to address his homosexuality. *Spinning The Wheel* was almost a counterpart to *Fastlove*. "It wasn't written from a personal point of view, where I was complaining about someone sleeping around," he told *Attitude*. Instead, here was a sort-of 'open relationship blues' that relates to any pairing that turns a blind eye to each other's to-ing and fro-ing.

32

THE EDGE OF HEAVEN

EPIC 1986

So that was it – the rumours were true. As *A Different Corner* hit No.1, George and Andrew announced that it was over, and they would bow out with a single, album and concert that June. Released as a double-pack single with an updated *Wham Rap!*, plus *Battlestations* and a cover of Was (Not Was)'s *Where Did Your Heart Go?* (which went on to enter the Top 40 by itself), the single became their fourth and final No.1. George reckoned no one listened to Wham! lyrics, so had written this one as "deliberately and overtly sexual".

37

BAD BOYS

INNERVISION 1983

Keen to capitalise on this newfound audience gained by *Young Guns*, George hastily knocked up this romp about teen rebellion accompanied with a camp-as-tits video of him and Andrew leathered up, and looking like the least convincing teenagers imaginable. It's a song he was never fond of: "I wrote to a formula for *Bad Boys*, trying to replicate something else. That's something I'd never done before and have never done since." While many would make the most of a No.2 single, George's feelings were made known and he upset fans when he omitted it from 1997's *The Best Of Wham!*.

36

THIS IS NOT REAL LOVE

SONY BMG 2006

One of two new tracks, alongside *An Easier Affair*, recorded for his *Twenty Five* compilation – this time highlighting Wham! hits alongside his own – *This Is Not Real Love* saw George teaming up with ex-Sugababe Mutya Buena, yet to fully launch her own solo career. They were unable to make a video due to schedules, but Mutya did appear at one of the Earls Court shows as part of George's 25 Live dates. Mutya said: "Starting off again as a soloist and working with George Michael was a pleasing moment. I'm not sure if it was crazy but it was special."

35

FREEEK!

POLYDOR 2002

Having recharged his batteries after the release of covers album *Songs From The Last Century*, George gradually began the new century preparing his next album, which would eventually arrive in 2004 in the shape of *Patience*. This then-one-off single was released through Polydor on a single-by-single trial. Structured around *Breathe And Stop* by Q-Tip, *Try Again* (Aaliyah) and *N.T.* (Kool & The Gang), *Freeek!* was even more overtly sexual and dealt with how the internet was starting to impact modern romance.

31

I'M YOUR MAN

EPIC 1985

Ten months in pop is a lifetime, so when Wham! spent much of 1985 away from the charts and touring around the world, these portents of doom – plus George's fresh beard – suggested that they were about to split. The song was, George declared, all about sex, and a video filmed at The Marquee club rammed this point home. Released in September, *I'm Your Man* became the duo's third UK No.1, and was the last song they performed together at their Final show at Wembley Stadium the following year.

30

AS

SONY 1999

The second new song recorded for *Ladies & Gentlemen* was a cover of Stevie Wonder's *As*, in a duet with Mary J Blige. Mary's label pulled the track from the US version after George's arrest, that occurred the day after the duet was recorded. As Mary told *The Guardian*, "I grew up watching Wham! on MTV. And when he met me, he was like: 'I love you! You're the greatest!' Just to be recognised by him was amazing. So the next day, when the scandal blew up, I was like: 'Oh shit!' But that never stopped me from loving him."

Keen to capitalise on this newfound audience gained by *Young Guns*, George hastily knocked up this romp about teen rebellion accompanied with a camp-as-tits video of him and Andrew leathered up, and looking like the least convincing teenagers imaginable

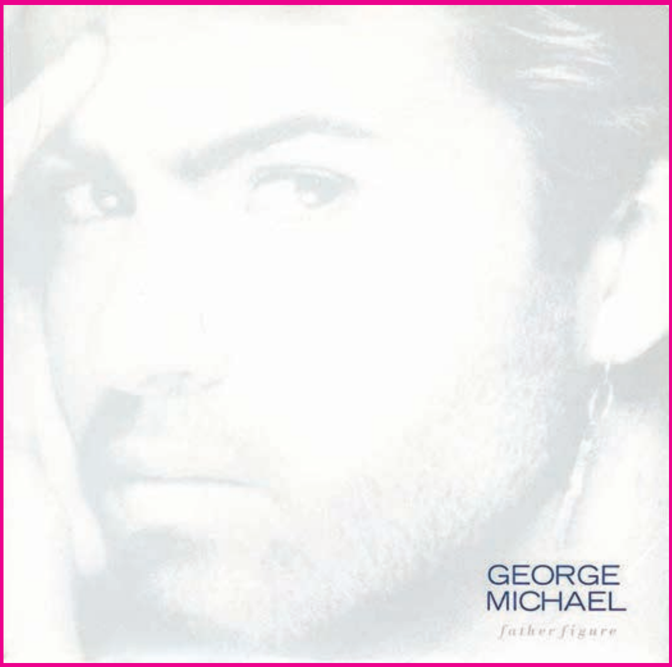
> The video for *Father Figure*, which starred model Tania Coleridge as his love interest, further established George and his heterosexuality for the American buyers, although he'd since admitted he'd had sex with men at this point

29
ROUND HERE
SONY 2004

Round Here was a song about George's childhood in Kingsbury Park, Hertfordshire, his birth and first day at school, reflecting on how his parents first got together, and how Wham! was formed to the music of The Specials, The Jam and ABC "falling like rain to the streets… when all that I wanted was to be someone". The song has now gained a special place in his followers' hearts, with places mentioned in the lyrics now visited by fans as part of a 'Round Here Walk'. The music video, directed by Andy Morahan, was partially filmed in Kingsbury and the song made No.32 in 2004.

28
FIVE LIVE EP
PARLOPHONE 1992

It would probably be quite a good round on *Pointless*, trying to remember who joined Queen to perform at the Freddie Mercury Tribute concert at Wembley Stadium. The highlight of the day, somewhat predictably, was George Michael's short set where he performed Queen's *'39*, was joined by Lisa Stansfield on *These Are The Days Of Our Lives* and stole the entire show with a rendition of *Somebody To Love*. Released with his live versions of Seal's *Killer* and The Temptations' *Papa Was A Rollin' Stone*, the *Five Live* EP shot in at No.1, raising money for the Mercury Phoenix Trust.



23
FATHER FIGURE
EPIC 1987

Released as the third single off *Faith*, *Father Figure* was an altogether more mysterious affair compared to the country-billy romp of the previous single. The video, which starred model Tania Coleridge as his love interest, further established George and his heterosexuality for the American buyers, although he'd since admitted he'd had sex with men at this point. Somewhat ruining his run of Top 10 singles when it stalled at No.11 in the UK, it spent two weeks at No.1 in the US in early 1988.

22
I CAN'T MAKE YOU LOVE ME
VIRGIN 1997

For the single release of *Older*'s title track, an EP was put together featuring album cut *The Strangest Thing* alongside covers of Antônio Carlos Jobim's *Desafinado*, in a duet with Astrud Gilberto, and Bonnie Raitt's *I Can't Make You Love Me*. It was one of her biggest hits, and went on to be considered one of the greatest songs ever written in various polls, as well as being inducted into the Grammy Hall Of Fame. Released as a double A-side with *Older*, it would take George to No.3 on the UK Singles Chart.

21
DECEMBER SONG (I DREAMED OF CHRISTMAS)
AEGEAN/ISLAND 2008

On the final date of his 25 Live tour, George announced that *December Song* would be available for free from his website over Christmas 2008. sampling Frank Sinatra's *The Christmas Waltz*, this reflection on Christmas past was originally written with the Spice Girls in mind before George decided to keep it for himself. Reaching UK No.14, the track could have been a much bigger hit had enough copies been available after his performance on that year's *X Factor*.

27

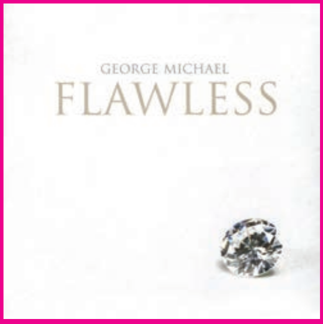
HEAL THE PAIN
EPIC 1990/SONY 2008

Heal The Pain had been a very Beatle-y type number on *Listen Without Prejudice*, and on original release as a single reached No.31 in 1991. In 2005, when appearing on Chris Evans' BBC Radio 2 show that December, George revealed that he had recorded a version of the track the previous week with Paul McCartney, in whose style the song was written. That version was later added to the greatest hits collection *Twenty Five* in 2006, and in 2008 it was released as a single in the US. Lemon Jelly later used an uncredited sample of the track on the B-side of *Rolled/Oats*.

26

WHAM RAP! (ENJOY WHAT YOU DO)
INNERVISION 1982

Rap had barely crept into the pop charts with a handful of hits such as *The Message* and *Rapper's Delight* hitting the Top 10. The likes of Haircut 100 and Spandau Ballet had flirted with it, but no one had gone full 'lyrical flow', especially not on a debut single. This banger failed to ignite initially, but reached No.8 when re-released after the success of *Young Guns* at the start of 1983. Even Paul Weller admired the explicitly political lyrics about unemployment, although The Special AKA poked fun at it on their *Bright Lights* single in 1984.



25

FLAWLESS (GO TO THE CITY)
SONY 2004

Flawless had already been a hit for New York trio The Ones in 2001. George Michael, aware that he may have picked up new young gay fans via *Outside*, wanted to celebrate them and the idea of heading to a city to be themselves. It was only after he went on a date and the freaked-out fan said he liked *Flawless* that he went for it. He told *Attitude* magazine: "Don't you think that's like my first proper queen's record? I think it's important that I can be out there and say that I'm a big tart and still have a big smash album."

24

TOO FUNKY
EPIC 1992

In 1992 George helped put together the compilation *Red Hot + Dance*, alongside numbers from Seal, Madonna and EMF as part of the Red Hot Benefit series that had been one of the first AIDS charity efforts from the music business. He donated three new tracks, *Happy, Do You Really Want To Know* and *Too Funky*. The latter became a Top 5 hit in the UK helped by another supermodel-aided video. It would be George's last single for Sony, as their apparent lack of support for the album was one of the factors in his legal action against them.

20

I KNEW YOU WERE WAITING (FOR ME)
EPIC 1987

An ambition of George's was to record with Aretha Franklin, and now at the point where such things can be arranged, the pair teamed up on this Narada Michael Walden-produced track and scored a transatlantic No.1 in January 1987. It was the first time that solo George released a single not written by himself, instead opting for a Simon Climie and Dennis Morgan-penned affair. It became Aretha's only UK chart-topper.

19

COWBOYS AND ANGELS
EPIC 1990

According to George this song was about "a strange love triangle involving a woman who's madly in love with me and a man who I was madly in love with and none of it came to anything, but I got a good song out of it." Reaching UK No.45, the single may not have been the hit it should have been, but works wonders in the context of *Listen Without Prejudice* and is a fan favourite. The saxophone solo was by Andy Hamilton, who'd parped over *Rio* as well as touring with George on his Faith jaunt.

18

FREEDOM
EPIC 1984

As *Wake Me Up…* was a tribute to pop from yore, *Freedom* was more of a nod to soul and Motown. It became the duo's second No.1 and reached No.3 in the US. Compared to the otherwise cool relationship with *Careless Whisper*, George believed *Freedom* was where his talents began to shine, speaking to *The Big Issue*: "I thought, 'I can't believe I've just done that!' I was absolutely thrilled. Because until then I had no real understanding of my abilities, but with *Freedom*, I started to take myself seriously as a writer."

17

DON'T LET THE SUN GO DOWN ON ME EPIC 1991

Of course, Elton and George were no strangers to collaborating with each other, a relationship reaching back to when they first performed this song together at Live Aid in 1985, and George helped out on Elton's *Ice On Fire* album later that year. George performed it on his Cover To Cover tour and, for the final show at Wembley Arena on 23 March 1991, Michael brought out John as a surprise guest to sing it with him. It was the first time George had entered the UK Singles Chart at No.1, and it gave Elton his third chart topper – after his original only reached No.16 in 1974 – as a bonus.

> George was still technically half of Wham! when he released his first 'proper' solo single and he was only the second – after Stevie Wonder – to hit the No.1 spot with a song written, arranged, performed and produced by one artist

16

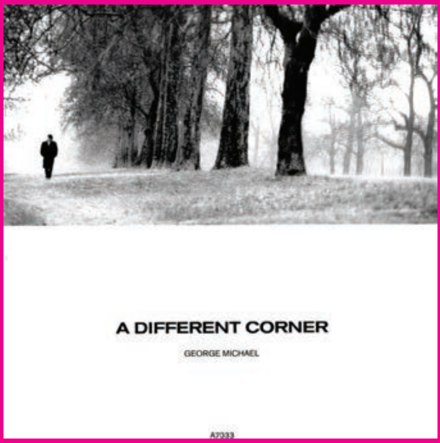
PRAYING FOR TIME EPIC 1990

After finishing the Faith campaign and tour in the summer of 1989, George had wanted people to focus more on his songwriting. He told the *New York Times*: "No event inspired the song. It's my way of trying to figure out why it's so hard for people to be good to each other. I believe the problem is conditional as opposed to being something inherent in mankind." In the film that accompanied the reissued album in 2017, Liam Gallagher reckoned George displayed "Lennon in him" on this number, while *Rolling Stone* described the song as "a distraught look at the world's astounding woundedness."

12

YOU HAVE BEEN LOVED VIRGIN 1997

The *Older* campaign concluded with the release of *You Have Been Loved* as a double A-side with *The Strangest Thing '97*. Originally written for Anselmo Feleppa, the song picked up additional airplay thanks to the national mood after the death of Princess Diana on 31 August that year (the airwaves heavily featured gentler singles such as The Verve's *The Drugs Don't Work* and Oasis' *Stand By Me*). George got to UK No.2 behind the overwhelming sales juggernaut that was Elton John's *Candle In The Wind '97* re-do.



11

A DIFFERENT CORNER EPIC 1986

George was still technically half of Wham! when he released his first 'proper' solo single – *Careless Whisper* has been billed as 'Wham! featuring George Michael' in many territories – and he was only the second, after Stevie Wonder, to hit the No.1 spot with a song written, arranged, performed and produced by one artist. "I was only 19," George revealed to an audience in 2014. "The best critique I ever heard of that song was from a friend of mine who said, 'It's beautiful… pathetic, but beautiful.'"

10

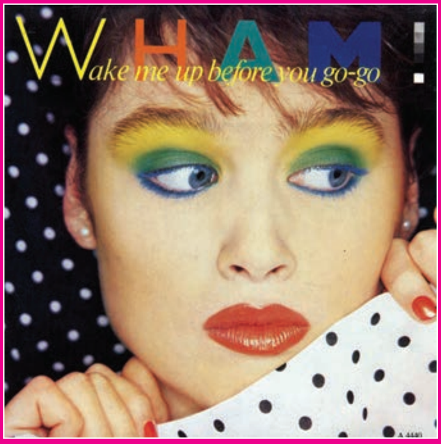
JESUS TO A CHILD VIRGIN 1996

Freed at last from his contractual palavers, George was faced with far more pressing matters in 1993 when his lover Anselmo Feleppa died from an AIDS-related brain haemorrhage. Unable to write for 18 months afterwards, when George penned the lyrics in just under an hour he realised he was ready to record again. Having performed it at the MTV Awards in Berlin in 1994, the song was eventually released in January 1996. It became a huge hit across the world and was his first single from any of his studio albums to top the UK chart.

15

AMAZING
SONY 2004

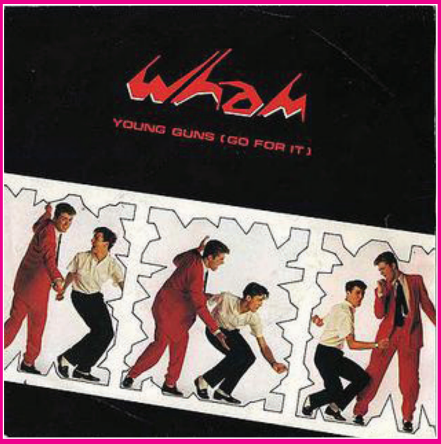
After he'd re-signed with Sony at the end of 2003, the much-delayed *Patience* was finally set for release that March, a few weeks after *Amazing* had hit the shelves. Dedicated to his then-partner Kenny Goss, whom George had been in a relationship with between 1998 and 2011, it was the first track he started and the last to be completed for the album. Speaking at the time, George said: "It is remarkably unusual to hear me singing something so lovey-dovey. Normally, I am better at writing about misery… The great thing is that I still feel the undying love."



14

WAKE ME UP BEFORE YOU GO-GO EPIC 1984

Based on a note that Andrew had left on his bedroom door with instructions to his parents to tell him to get out of bed – he had written 'go' twice – this was George's tribute to pop from the 50s and 60s, featuring nods to familiar elements of past hits. He'd planned to have a real drummer on the track, but they were late and so he kept the Linn drum beat he'd used on the demo. Heralded as a surefire No.1 – the duo believed it would enter at that position, something very few acts managed back in those days – it entered at No.4 and got there the week after.



13

YOUNG GUNS (GO FOR IT)
INNERVISION 1982

Had someone who worked on *Saturday Superstore* not spotted Wham! performing in Stringfellows, their history would have been very different indeed. Having made that TV debut with the addition of Dee C Lee and Shirlie Holliman, a suitably impressed *Top Of The Pops* invited them on to the show as a last-minute replacement for another turn, even though the song was just outside the Top 40. A few weeks later, they found themselves with a Top 3 single about the perils of getting married too young, and George telling his mate he should be out there having fun instead.

09

EVERYTHING SHE WANTS
EPIC 1984

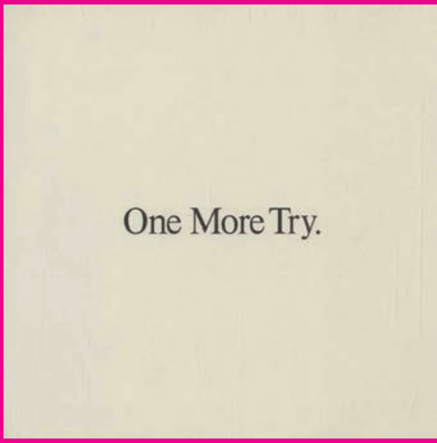
Released as a double A-side to *Last Christmas*, and the fourth track to be taken from *Make It Big*, *Everything She Wants* helped buoy the sales into the new year when DJs flipped the record over. The song tells the tale of a man several months into a loveless marriage and realising that with the news of a baby, he can't easily back out of it now either. It could quite feasibly be the subject of *Young Guns* reflecting on his lot. When it reached No.1 in the US, Wham! became the first band since the Bee Gees to have scored three chart-toppers from one album.

08

FAITH
EPIC 1987

While held off No.1 in the UK by the Bee Gees' *You Win Again*, *Faith* spent four weeks at the top in the US. The iconic and knowingly camp imagery of the video, with George rocking out with a guitar was a sort-of marketing move on Michael's part, seeing as he didn't actually know how to play the axe. His reasoning being "Americans, if you stick a guitar on, you've got a bigger penis, simple as that." Fancy that! *Smash Hits*, gently poking fun at the new serious George, soon took to asking him if he'd ever been sick in his cowboy boots.

Having made that TV debut with the addition of Dee C Lee and Shirlie Holliman, a suitably impressed *Top Of The Pops* invited them on to the show as a last-minute replacement for another turn, even though *Young Guns* was just outside the Top 40



07
ONE MORE TRY
EPIC 1987

Possibly one of George's finest moments, *One More Try* featured one of his greatest vocal performances. Even Elton John wishes he'd written it. A very personal song, with George's reluctance to enter into a new courtship having gone through bad experiences in the past. He said it was "about my attitude coming out of my last relationship and into this new one when I was pretty unwilling to be open to anything." Another US No.1, it made No.8 in the UK. Incidentally, despite the ubiquity of the album at the time, none of the singles from *Faith* went to the top in Britain.

During this period George was in court having his first of many battles with a record company, but that seemed miles away as he and Andrew dressed up as airline pilots, cavorting about in Speedos and drinking cocktails in Ibiza

06
LAST CHRISTMAS
EPIC 1984

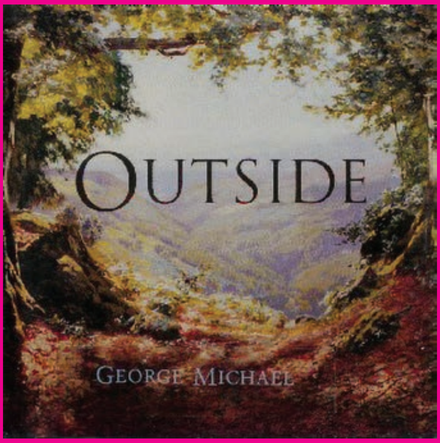
It would have been nice to end 1984 with a third (or fourth) No.1 when Wham! released this in December, only Band Aid juggernaut *Do They Know It's Christmas?* was rush-released at the same time and blew everything else out of the water. Still, George was on that too, after all, and so then had to settle for being the biggest-selling No.2 of all time with UK sales of over two million, with it being one of the most streamed Christmas songs ever. That all changed in 2021 when it finally secured the top spot and it's now as much a part of the festive season as flammable jumpers.

05
FASTLOVE
VIRGIN 1996

A song about no-strings-attached sex, wherein George nips out for a bit of frisky action, with the words "in the absence of security, I made my way into the night" suggesting that such nocturnal activities were something he'd been enjoying long before any arrests or tabloid exposés. Another straight-in-at-No.1 in the UK chart, the song interpolates Patrice Rushen's *Forget Me Nots*. Adele sang it at the Grammys when they paid tribute to him, restarting the song as Michael was "too important to her" to not get it right.

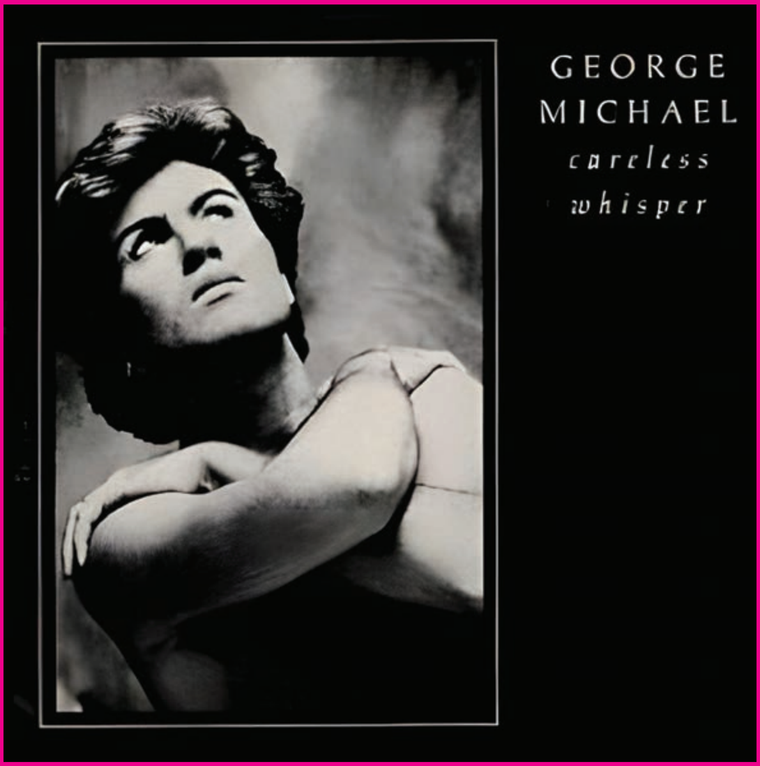
04
CLUB TROPICANA
INNERVISION 1983

Breaking from the strident Brit-funk of the first few releases, *Club Tropicana* was the song that solidified Wham! as a true pop package. During this period George was in court having his first of many battles with a record company, trying to get out of his deal with Innervision, but that seemed miles away as he and Andrew dressed up as airline pilots – and Dee and Shirlie as air hostesses – cavorting about in Speedos and drinking cocktails in Ibiza in the legendary video. It became their fourth Top 10 hit in nine months, hitting No.4 in August 1983.



03
OUTSIDE
SONY 1998

Just in case anybody was still on the fence regarding his sexuality, George Michael came out of the closet and torched it with *Outside*. Released ahead of his *Ladies & Gentleman* compilation, this joyous ode to alfresco fun came a few months after his arrest for indulging in 'lewd behaviour' at a Beverley Hills public toilet. After a £500 fine and 80 hours of community service, George turned the incident into art, accompanied by a brilliantly provocative video. Denied the top spot by Cher's *Believe*, it's gone on to become a gay anthem.



02

CARELESS WHISPER EPIC 1984

It's literally a hair's breadth between these top two songs, but trust us, aside from now going into hiding, we know what we're doing. *Careless Whisper* was something of a bold move at the time, launching a solo career just after you've had your band's first No.1 with a line about 'not planning on going solo' in it, but George was a canny operator. Written by him and Andrew when they were only 17, it was first recorded with soul legend Jerry Wexler, yet George wasn't feeling it. Imagine the brass balls of dumping the work of a man who'd produced Aretha Franklin, Otis Redding and signed Led Zeppelin. But George knew what he was doing. The re-recorded version went on to top the charts in 25 countries, selling six million copies. George would eventually dismiss *Careless Whisper* in an interview with *The Big Issue* in 2009: "I'm still a bit puzzled why it's made such an impression on people… I was only 17 and didn't really know much about anything – and certainly nothing much about relationships."

It's possibly the one song that people would immediately think of with George Michael, but *Freedom '90* only managed a – for George – lowly No.28 position, and yet it towers over his catalogue

01

FREEDOM '90 EPIC 1990

Something rum was going on in late 1990 as regards two of the biggest acts of the previous decade were concerned. Pet Shop Boys had issued *Being Boring* as a single, and it broke their run of Top 10 hits, yet you can't not imagine them performing it now. It was also the case with *Freedom '90* for George. It's possibly the one song that people would immediately think of with George Michael, but *Freedom '90* only managed a – for George – lowly No.28 position, yet it towers over his catalogue. The video, possibly just as iconic, was directed by David Fincher and features Naomi Campbell, Linda Evangelista, Tatjana Patitz, Christy Turlington and Cindy Crawford – supermodels direct from the cover of *Vogue* – lip-syncing to the lyrics, intercut with symbols of George's past, most notably his *Faith* leather jacket and guitar (which seeing as he couldn't play in the first place, was probably a relief), bursting into flames. It was covered by Robbie Williams as his hastily released first solo single, but despite eclipsing George's original chartwise, was instantly forgotten once his career started to explode. The rapturous response to George's performance of it at the Olympics' closing ceremony more than made up for the public's indifference to it as a single.

Patience is a virtue

GEORGE MICHAEL'S WORKING METHODS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A SOURCE OF MYSTERY. JUST HOW MUCH MUSIC DID HE MAKE IN ADDITION TO HIS FIVE SOLO ALBUMS? HOW DID GEORGE'S CLOSE-KNIT TEAM EARN HIS TRUST? AND DID HE SECRETLY GET DAFT PUNK TO PRODUCE ONE OF HIS SINGLES? GEORGE'S TEAM RARELY TALK PUBLICLY, BUT IN THIS ARCHIVE INTERVIEW FROM 2019, JAMES JACKMAN – THE STAR'S CO-WRITER AND CO-PRODUCER SINCE 1997 – GAVE *CLASSIC POP* THE FIRST IN-DEPTH INSIGHT INTO GEORGE'S LATER CAREER.

JOHN EARLS

This Is How (We Want You To Get High)* was released in 2019 as a single and can be heard on the soundtrack to the Emma Thompson-scripted movie *Last Christmas

The exact amount of music George Michael made has been a constant source of speculation. After Wham! split in 1986, George made five albums including covers set *Songs From The Last Century* before his death aged just 53 in 2016. When the soundtrack album to festive romcom *Last Christmas* was released in November 2019, it offered the first taste of the music George had been working on. *This Is How (We Want You To Get High)* is classic George Michael – a social commentary song that, despite its hard-hitting message about drug and alcohol abuse, is an absolute banger.

This Is How (We Want You To Get High) was co-written and co-produced by George with James Jackman. James isn't a high-profile name – but he was a key part of George Michael's career for the last 19 years of his life. He co-wrote more songs with George than anyone since Andrew Ridgeley and knows better than anyone the care George took in the studio to get his songs just right.

"The album George was making when he passed would definitely have been a return to form," says Jackman. "It was an upbeat album, a 21st century *Faith*. George was excited by it, as was everyone who worked with him on it."

Since *Patience* in 2004, George had thrown himself back into touring. Having become freaked out by the intense touring demands of *Faith*, George lost his love of live work for some years. But celebrating a quarter of a century in music led to his wild 25Live tour, before the sumptuous orchestral shows of the *Symphonica* concerts.

"After he completed 25Live and *Symphonica*, George wanted and knew he needed to come back with an album," James explains. "He wanted it to be positive. Around *Older* and *Patience*, there was a lot of loss in George's life. They're moving, personal albums and George was ready to come back with something brighter. The media love knocking big stars down – but they also love a comeback kid, and George was like Lazarus."

However, fans shouldn't expect a sudden glut of posthumous material to be released. George completed four songs for his final album, including *This Is How (We Want You To Get High)*. "A number of songs were worked on and developed," Jackman reveals. "But they weren't completed. You'd have a verse and half a chorus of a song, or a guide vocal over a completed track which doesn't have any backing vocals. George was such a perfectionist and had control over his music, it'd be disrespectful to start trying to finish songs for him."

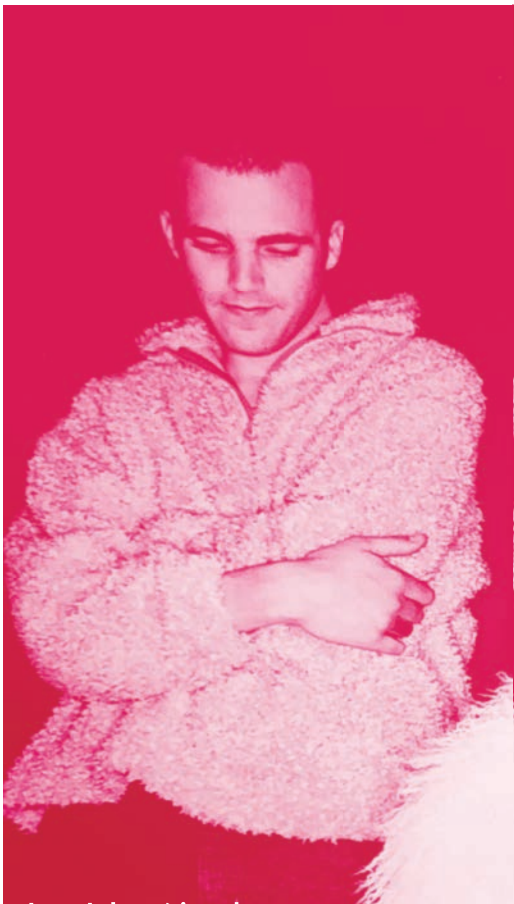
POSTHUMOUS RELEASES

George's catalogue is controlled by his estate – in essence, his manager and lifelong friend David Austin, George's sisters Mel and Yioda, and his father Jack. "With a lot of artists, people posthumously put out all sorts of

© Brian Aris/Live 8 via Getty Images

demos and you think, 'Why have you done that?'" admits James. "George's family don't want to suddenly pull out loads of demos from the vault. They only want songs George felt comfortable with. That applies to songs from George's old album sessions, too. How the other three songs George finished will come out and on what projects, I don't know."

There could potentially be some remixes of existing tracks, though it's hard to improve on George's originals. James recalls Mark Ronson being asked to remix *Freedom! '90* for the 25th anniversary of *Listen Without Prejudice Vol.1* only to tell George: "I can't do it – it'd be like reworking the Mona Lisa."



James Jackman (pictured right) during his days in Trigger – with vocalist Arianne Schrieber (centre) and Jim Thomas. George Michael signed the band to his label, Aegean Records. Inset: the band's single *Chameleon* and album *Smoke And Mirrors*

Emma Thompson wrote, produced and starred in 2019's *Last Christmas* and was one of the lucky few to have heard all four completed songs early on. "Emma was apparently dancing around her kitchen to it all," laughs Jackman. "The film was keen to use the music, but the estate didn't want to throw all the unreleased songs into one movie. Emma chose *This Is How...* as it resonates with the film's themes and wrote it into the final scene."

The genesis of *This Is How...* was a backing track James gave to George in 2012. "George phoned me one evening, really excited and said, 'I've got the most amazing hook over your track,'" James recalls. "He said, 'I can really hear this working' and played it down the phone. It was classic George Michael, very immediate." Despite George's patient working methods, once he got inspired songs often came together quickly. "For George, it was always about the lyrical idea," says Jackman. "Once he had a lyric idea, he'd usually finish the main demo pretty quickly. We'd work flat out to develop it and complete the song.

"*This Is How...* is a social comment song, but it's not autobiographical. It's got George's trademark humour and self-deprecation."

> George had to be guarded. So you need friends you can have a laugh with behind closed doors and know they'll be discreet.
>
> JAMES JACKMAN

SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS

Although George wrote all his own lyrics, he'd often discuss ideas for songs with co-writers like James, David Austin, Johnny Douglas, Ruadhri Cushnan and his long-term engineer Niall Flynn. "When George was struggling for ideas, we'd debate a lot," remembers James. "George was a very bright man who was socially conscious, very aware of the world and his surroundings. Ideas that we had spoken about over the years would spark something in him. He liked a debate."

Of course, not every song idea would get used. "You had to be thick-skinned," Jackman admits. "George would often sketch an idea, leave for the day so you'd add some ideas to his, but he'd come in the next day and disregard the lot. It was often a slow process – you'd turn out ideas, work on them for weeks and those ideas would be shelved. I was able to be honest with George. He didn't want to be surrounded by sycophants. George had to feel comfortable with you, because if you're working 70 hours a week with someone, he has to trust you creatively and technically. There were times when I had production input on a track that went to radio and George would go, 'I *told* you that part should have been like this, not like that! I should never have listened to you!' But he took the rough with the smooth and he had a very trusted group – the same with his session musicians."

Once James earned George's trust, the pair became good friends. "George was a very private person," says James. "Once he established a relationship, it was worth a lot to him. George was pretty much a kid when he got successful, he had to be guarded. So you need friends you can have a laugh with behind closed doors and know they'll be discreet. George had a wicked sense of humour. He was able to laugh at himself."

George befriended Jackman when he signed James' band Trigger to his record label Aegean in 1996. A trip-hop/drum & bass crossover trio in the vein of Morcheeba, Olive and Massive Attack, George featured on their debut single *Chameleon*. "We were Pete Tong's Record Of The Week and Jo Whiley liked us, we were having our moment," recalls Jackman. Tragedy struck when fellow keyboardist Jim Thomas died of leukaemia while finishing their album. *Smoke And Mirrors* was released in 1997, but James and singer Arianne Schrieber decided not to carry on without Jim.

HANGING ON THE TELEPHONE

For the next 19 years, James saw more of George than anyone apart from his wife and two children. "If you worked with George, it was like being a doctor on call," smiles James. "Before we had

© RANKIN

Life inside the bubble of fame

James Jackman got to see both sides of George Michael's success in working with the singer. "There were elements of fame that George was uncomfortable with, like any big artist," James explains. "I'd come into the studio on a Monday and George would say, 'What did you get up to?' I'd tell him, 'Oh, we went and sat in a beer garden as it was such a sunny day.' And George would say, 'I wish I could do that…' I went to restaurants with George a lot but, even in a nice, comfortable restaurant that you'd think would be private, George was always the centre of attention and everyone would have his eye. To be that famous for his entire adult life, there were times that felt difficult and you'd feel caged in your own home."

The flipside was being able to show his talent to the world. "George loved engaging with the audience," says James. "To have that adulation and knowing he was extremely good at his profession – George loved that. He knew he moved a lot of people in his music, and he also knew it was music which will stand the test of time."

our kids, I was in Cornwall with my wife when I had a call from George going, 'Where are you? Can you come back to work? I've got an idea.' Or George's manager would phone on day two of a five-day break. But you knew that was George. If he had that moment, you'd be there. There were periods of weeks and weeks without a day off."

The most extreme moment of duty came in the run-up to *Patience*. George had a studio built at his home in Goring, in rural Oxfordshire. The studio was built by the team at George's favourite recording base, Sarm East. "The house was next to a weir, so it was built to be completely sealed from any water rising up," Jackman explains. "But they didn't think water would come through the front door and down a flight of stars into the studio. I got a phone call between Christmas and New Year from George's manager – 'The studio's flooded! You need to get here *now*!' By the time I got there, a torrent of water was lapping against the faders. The insurance loss adjuster came down and just went white."

The damage cost £500,000 but, more importantly to George, no insurer would touch the idea of George trying to rebuild the studio.

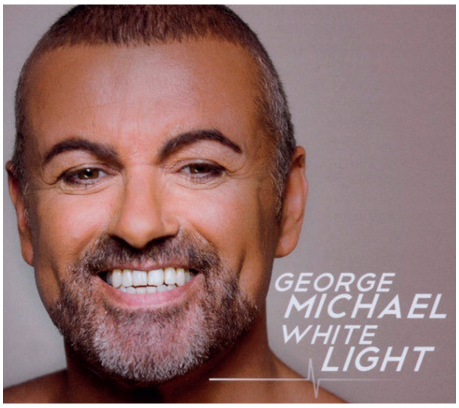
"George had been comfortable working from home," says James. "Working at commercial studios was costly for him. He'd book a studio out but, if he wasn't feeling it, he wouldn't turn up for five days. But he never counted up the money, it was always about the music."

Seeing George at work was worth the disruption to normal life. Easygoing and funny, it's easy to imagine James being a calm presence in the studio. "It was like any job," he says. "For 95-98 per cent of the time, it was exceedingly dull. You're there scratching your arse while George is thinking, or spending hours trying to find the right hi-hat sound. We had cameras set up in the studio for a time, maybe as archiving for documentaries. But David and George looked back at the footage and it was just so dull! It was worth it for those 3-5 per cent moments of inspiration, because the hairs would stand up on the back of your neck.

"When *This Is How…* came together after the initial sketchy idea, it was wonderful. First hearing George's vocal on *John And Elvis Are Dead* was just brilliant. When a song came together, it was incredible to be around, because you were watching one of the greatest singer-songwriters this country has ever produced at the top of his game. That was magical to be a part of."

The studio team at work during final mix sessions of *Patience* in 2004 at the Studio 1 control room of Air Studios. From left: Niall Flynn, George Michael, David Austin, James Jackman and Adam Noble, plus George's dogs Abbey and Meg

© Image courtesy of James Jackman



© Image courtesy of James Jackman

One of Jackman's first co-writes with George isn't officially credited to him. The story of 2002 hit *Freeek!* is bound up with Daft Punk. George had been invited to work with the duo on what became their 2005 LP *Human After All*.

"Daft Punk sent a catalogue of demos for George to potentially write around," James recalls. "Those are in George's archives. He went to Paris for a couple of weeks for some sessions. When he came back, I said, 'How did it go?'and he went, 'Yeeeah… I sat on a beanbag in Guy-Manuel's flat eating M&Ms.'"

George ultimately didn't feel he could contribute to those demos. "When Daft Punk's album came out, George said when he heard *Robot Rock*, 'Oh, that's one of the demos they gave to me!'" He remained a fan, and *Freeek!* was inspired by the experience. It's officially credited as being co-written and co-produced by The Moogymen – an alias that's gone down in George Michael folklore. "*Freeek!* was such a departure for George that we wanted some intrigue about it," says Jackman. "We thought, 'Let's be quirky about this one'. It was brilliant when fans started speculating that The Moogymen was an alias for Daft Punk! Really, though, The Moogymen were me, Niall Flynn and Ruadhri Cushnan."

George's love of Daft Punk was typical of his eclectic taste. James points to George's cover of This Mortal Coil's *Song To The Siren* on the B-side of *White Light* and his cover in Manchester of Ian Brown's *F.E.A.R.* on the Symphonica tour as examples of the singer's love of the offbeat. He was also a huge Massive Attack and Tricky fan. It was George's admiration of Kanye West which led to him experimenting with treating his voice. Using an Auto-Tune-style box called TC Helicon Voicelive 2, George experimented with his vocals from his 2012 cover of New Order's *True Faith* onwards – it's there in *This Is How (We Want You To Get High)*, too.

> George left a big hole in my life professionally and personally. We're blessed by the musical legacy George left behind.
>
> JAMES JACKMAN

George was aware of the controversy of such a gifted singer using the effect. "A lot of people reacted by saying, 'It's sacrilege, you can't use that on George Michael's voice!'" James recalls. "But why couldn't he? People felt George's voice was too hallowed to experiment with, but he was being creative. George felt very frustrated that people wouldn't accept him branching out. When he covered *True Faith*, I did try to steer him, saying, 'It works incredibly well, but perhaps you could use your natural voice in the chorus?' But George was adamant he wanted the whole song like that and some people loved his *True Faith*. It disappointed him that people couldn't see he wanted to be more experimental. It would have been so

James Jackman at the Studio 2 mixing desk in Air Studios, London

From left: David Austin, Niall Flynn, George and James Jackman in the main control room at Air Studios during a string session recording for *Patience*

© Image courtesy of James Jackman

© Image courtesy of James Jackman

Above: Recording string arrangements for the *Patience* album at Air Studios

Live talkin'

A lot of James Jackman's time in the studio with George Michael was spent working on the music for the 25Live and Symphonica tours. "George had a natural fitness and stamina," says Jackman. "There were times when George did little exercise. He'd walk his dogs, but it was a sedentary life in the studio, sitting around for days and nights on end, eating a lot of unhealthy takeout. But then he'd get on stage and run around for two-and-a-half hours, singing while running about 10K during his shows!"

George's preparation for his tours was unusual for such a major artist. "George hired big rehearsal spaces for all the musicians and orchestras," James recalls. "Some performers would prepare for global shows like that by being there from 8am to 6pm every day. But George would come in for four hours every other day. Some people would think, 'Is he going to be ready for the shows?' – but he always was.

"George was so confident, having prepared all the details so meticulously, that he knew exactly what him and everyone around him had to do. He'd worked tirelessly making sure the visuals were right, the musicians were right, the merch was right. George's tours were a global event, but he'd get up there and he'd just deliver. The shows on 25Live were incredibly slick and well-executed, some of the best live performances I've ever seen."

much easier for George to knock out ballads, but he wanted to stretch himself artistically. On his final album, he experimented with his voice on other songs, but there would have been a lot of pure George vocals, too."

Talking to James, it's clear he's itching for people to hear those other finished songs. But, after George's passing, it will be a bittersweet experience. "We became very close friends," says Jackman. "George left a big hole in my life professionally and personally. It's difficult to hear his music. But we're blessed by the musical legacy George left behind. It's fantastic to hear the unreleased music getting out there and I think George would have been pleased and humbled by the outpouring of love he's had posthumously."

WHITE HEAT OF CREATIVITY

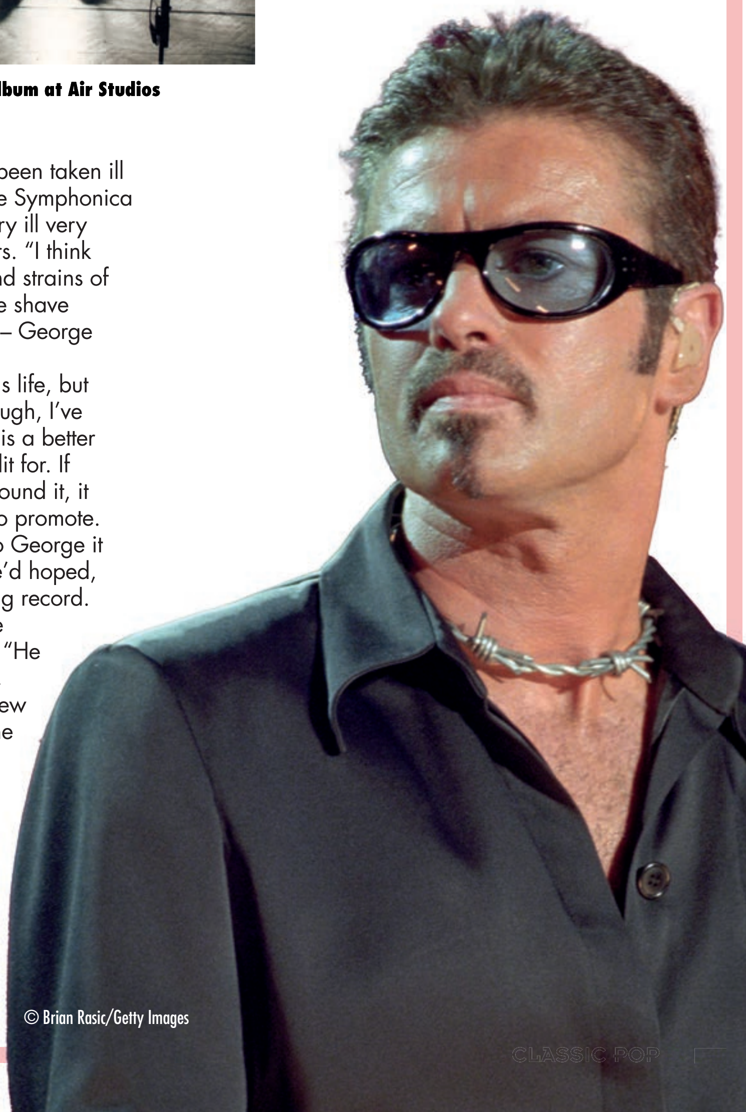
One of the many tragedies of George's passing is just how positive the singer seemed to be in his life and music when he died so suddenly of heart failure. One of the songs James created with George was *White Light*, the 2012 single which seems to have kickstarted his final burst of creativity. The song was written after George recovered from pneumonia, having been taken ill in Austria at the end of the Symphonica tour. "George became very ill very quickly," James remembers. "I think it was from the stresses and strains of touring. It was a real close shave and it was the white light – George felt he'd seen it.

"He'd had a nadir in his life, but *White Light* was, 'I'm through, I've come back.' *White Light* is a better record than it's given credit for. If there'd been an album around it, it would have been easier to promote.

"It was disappointing to George it didn't have the success he'd hoped, as it's such a cool-sounding record.

"George was the whole package," says Jackman. "He was a great singer, writer, arranger, producer, he knew how his music should come out *and* he had the looks. His records will be remembered and covered in 50 years' time.

"How many other performers tick all those boxes? I was blessed to be able to work with him."



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HANDS OF FATE

GEORGE MICHAEL ENTERED THE NEW MILLENNIUM WITH *SONGS FROM THE LAST CENTURY* RIDING HIGH IN THE CHART, FREE OF A RECORDING CONTRACT AND HEADING FOR A PERIOD OF BREAK-UPS, CONTROVERSY, TELEVISION FUN AND A RETURN TO THE BIGGEST STAGES ON THE PLANET

IAN WADE

As the year 2000 began, and seeing as the planet wasn't wiped out by the millennium bug after all, George resumed business when he recorded a duet with Whitney Houston that March. *If I Told You That* had already appeared on Whitney's album *My Love Is Your Love* in 1998, but added George's vocal to a slightly rejigged version after the original plan of featuring Michael Jackson fell through. Co-produced by Rodney Jerkins, it was the second single the following August from her *Greatest Hits* collection.

By now, George was directing a large proportion of his personal energies into causes that mattered deeply to him – both on a professional level, and a personal one. In June, he made an appearance at the Pavarotti & Friends for Cambodia and Tibet concert alongside such turns such as Eurythmics, Tracy Chapman and Skunk Anansie. In October he outbid rivals – allegedly including Robbie Williams and Noel Gallagher – when he bought John Lennon's piano, the one he'd written *Imagine* on, no less, at an auction of the late Beatle's effects, for £1.45m. His plan was to return it to The Beatles Story museum in Liverpool, where it had previously just been on loan. Much closer to home, George made sure he was there for his friend Geri Halliwell, who was having a traumatic post-Spice Girls solo wobble. Geri Halliwell stayed at his house in Los Angeles in 2000; she later admitted that at the height of her eating disorder, she'd taken to rummaging through George's bins for food.

But what of George's own career? By the end of 2001, there were hints that something was finally afoot when he signed a deal with Universal. Though many labels were bidding to snap him up, his agreement with Polydor/Universal was, it transpired, more of a trial run. If the next couple of singles were a success, then he'd let them release the album.

Launched in March 2002 and accompanied by a fruity video which was premiered late at night on Channel 4, *Freeek!* was George's first self-penned single since *Outside*. With the singer keen to flip 180 degrees on the easy-listening style of *Songs From The Last Century*, it was a far more 21st century-flavoured effort featuring samples from Aaliyah, Kool & The Gang, and Q-Tip. Though it was expected to duke it out for the top spot in the UK charts with *Pop Idol*'s Gareth Gates' first single, it merely reached No.7.

In June, it was announced that the follow-up, a song called *Shoot The Dog* – a state-of-the-nation address based around a sample from The Human League's *Love Action (I Believe In Love)* – would be released that August. George put out a statement to explain the song and the video, and appeared on the BBC TV interview programme *Hardtalk* to discuss the Middle East crisis and further defend the single. In 2003, on *Breakfast With Frost*, he warned that war against Iraq could "light the touch paper" of Islamic fundamentalism.

George riding an Iraqi missile bound for Tony and Cherie Blair's bedroom in the satirical video for *Shoot The Dog*, created by the British TV series *2DTV*

George in the cyborg fantasy that was shot to promote 2002's *Freeek!*, directed by Joseph Kahn, the man behind Janet Jackson's $2.5 million video for *It Doesn't Really Matter*

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George and Kenny Goss at the Versace Couture launch party thrown by Donatella Versace at the Ritz in Paris in 2002

At the 2003 Brit Awards, George – appearing only on screen – performed a reworked version of *Faith* with rising star Ms Dynamite, and ended the month with an appearance on *The Graham Norton Show*, where he sang Don McLean's composition *The Grave* in protest against the looming Iraq war. He also delivered the song on *Top Of The Pop*s – his first appearance on the show in 17 years. The Beeb banned him from wearing a "No war, Blair out" T-shirt. McLean himself simply said, "I am proud of George Michael for standing up for life and sanity."

AT LONG LAST

After submerging himself for the rest of the year in finishing his next album, the announcement that George had re-signed with Sony for the worldwide release of *Patience* came in November. The decision, the star said, "had everything to do with [Tommy] Mottola leaving. I never had any problem with Sony in the UK, but America holds the purse strings. If you fall out with the boss, you're in trouble."

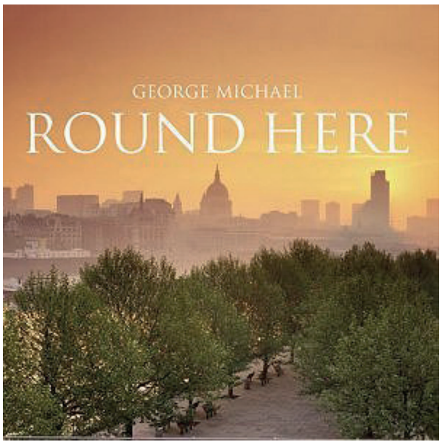
As 2004 began, *Amazing* was released just ahead of the album in March. It became a hit across Europe and entered the Top 5 in the UK. George also contributed to a three-part BBC Radio 2 documentary, *The George Michael Story,* broadcast across the month. Now well and truly on the promotional trail, he put in appearances on Michael Parkinson's chat show and turned up on *Oprah* in the US. He also, rather dramatically, declared he was going to retire, saying he would stop releasing CDs after *Patience*, instead launching his songs online for free.

Patience enjoyed a gratifying first-week sales of over 275,000 copies in its first week and hit the top five across the world in most countries bar Japan. On the Billboard list it made a muted No.12, but still sold over 381,000 copies, earning a gold certification.

> "THE SOAP OPERA LAUNCHED FROM THAT STATEMENT ELTON MADE. BUT HE HADN'T SEEN ME FOR YEARS."
>
> GEORGE MICHAEL

Keen to reaffirm his relationship with his gay fans, George chose his next single to be a reworking of *Flawless* by the New York-based trio The Ones, who'd taken it to the Top 10 a few years previously. Produced by A Touch Of Class, who'd worked with Scissor Sisters on a couple of numbers, *Flawless* was a dancefloor monster that seemed to connect the strands of early-00s New York nightlife perfectly, touching on the voguers, elements of electroclash and high fashion. The single entered the UK charts at No.8 and became his biggest hit on the dance lists in the US to date, topping Billboard's Hot Dance Club and Dance/Electronic sales lists.

In November, George had to deal with upsetting issues when a female intruder broke into his London address. While George didn't want to press charges, when she was found to be lurking near his house



Far left: George won hearts with a candid and revealing ***Parkinson*** **interview in 2007 while awaiting his day in court for driving while unfit. In the end, he was given 100 hours of community service.**
© Ferdaus Shamim/WireImage

again later the same day, she was cautioned for harassment. "The only reason they eventually took her to the police station was because she punched one of them," he informed *GQ* magazine. It wasn't the first time he'd suffered a disturbing invasion of privacy: the previous year, it was revealed, someone had actually lived under his floorboards for four days.

When *Round Here* was released as a single from *Patience*, it charted at No.36, one of his lowest positions in the UK. To coincide with *Round Here,* the documentary *A Different Story* was broadcast on BBC1. A candid behind-the-scenes look at the artist's operation, it featured George setting the record straight on a number of issues, plus contributions from Elton John, Mariah Carey, Sting and Noel Gallagher, as well as a reunion with Andrew Ridgeley.

More trouble reared its head when Elton was interviewed by *Heat* magazine in December, suggesting that all was not well with George and that he should "get out more". "George is in a strange place," Elton surmised. "There appears to be a deep-rooted unhappiness in his life." Firing off a furious letter to the editor within days of publication, George struck back. "I think that it's time to set the record straight about my friendship with Sir Elton John and how he may have come to such negative conclusions about my life," he snapped. "Elton John knows very little about George Michael, and that's a fact. And much as I am saddened that he would feel the need to criticise my album (which is, of course, in my humble opinion, a classic!), I am far more surprised that Elton seems to have forgotten me calling him a few months back to tell him that my American royalties from *Patience* would be donated entirely to the Elton John AIDS Foundation." Ouch.

In a 2006 interview with Michael Parkinson, George reflected that the harsh media treatment of his personal life really began when Elton made those adverse comments about his state of mind. "The trajectory of my particular soap opera launched

AND THE SATELLITE SAYS

GEORGE ON THE BOX

George – who was legendary for his enthusiastic consumption of soaps such as *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders* – certainly liked his telly. During this decade he popped up, often unannounced, as a guest star, as well as turning up to defend himself on random chat shows and news programmes.

In 2000 he made himself known as a fan of *Big Brother*, and much enjoyed its debut series in the UK. After a conversation had been broadcast on the subject of homosexuality, with the housemates shouting down the 'Nasty Nick' contestant over his views about George's 'outing', the singer sent a message to the show. "Whether you know it or not, your opinions have become important," he said. "To say thank you, for your kind words last night, please let me buy you all a drink when they let you out on parole… but preferably on a night when Nick is completely unavailable."

In 2003 George made an appearance on a celebrity version of *Who Wants to Be A Millionaire* teamed with Ronan Keating, who had shared the pain of losing his mother to cancer. They raised £32,000 for cancer charities in the shows that were broadcast over the Christmas period.

George's skits with David Walliams and Matt Lucas in various *Little Britain* guises are the highlight of 2005's Comic Relief night. "We filmed it in front of an audience and didn't tell them," Walliams recalled. "When I opened the door and George walked through, there was a stunned silence. It was a hoot."

George's sideline in sending himself up got a further boost as 2007 moved into 2008 when he featured in *The Catherine Tate Show*, Ricky Gervais' *Extras* and the US legal comedy drama *Eli Stone*. The ABC series premiered at the end of January 2008, and follows Stone, played by Jonny Lee Miller, a San Francisco lawyer who begins to have hallucinations of, among many other things, George Michael, with a soundtrack that only he can hear.

Each episode in the first series was named after a George or Wham! song, and George himself popped up throughout the series with musical numbers including *Amazing* and *Older*. During the final episode, where Stone has an operation to remove the brain aneurysm which was causing all the hallucinations in the first place, he meets God, who bears an uncanny resemblance to George, and is serenaded by him and the cast on a version of *Feeling Good*.

Finally, and perhaps most bizarrely, George featured in an *EastEnders* storyline in 2009, where his biggest fan Heather Trott, accompanied by her mate Shirley Carter, break into George's garden, spots someone inside and takes a photo. However while this is going on, Shirley – who is on lookout duty – realises they have the wrong house but declines to ruin Heather's happiness. Heather then seeks solace in a yoghurt pot lid that she retrieved from what she thought was George's bin, hoping it will become a lucky talisman for her and help her meet the man of her dreams. Barmy.

from that statement Elton made about 18 months ago when Elton hadn't seen me for years," he sighed.

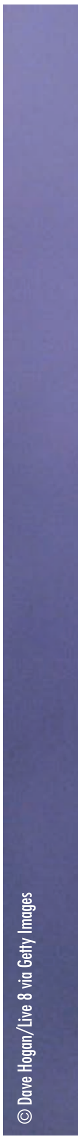
As his *A Different Story* film debuted at the Berlin International Film Festival, George told reporters that he wanted to "move his career into a different form", while adding that he didn't yet know what that form was going to be. He also revealed that under his contract with Sony Music, he was required to record two duets before regaining his artistic freedom.

HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

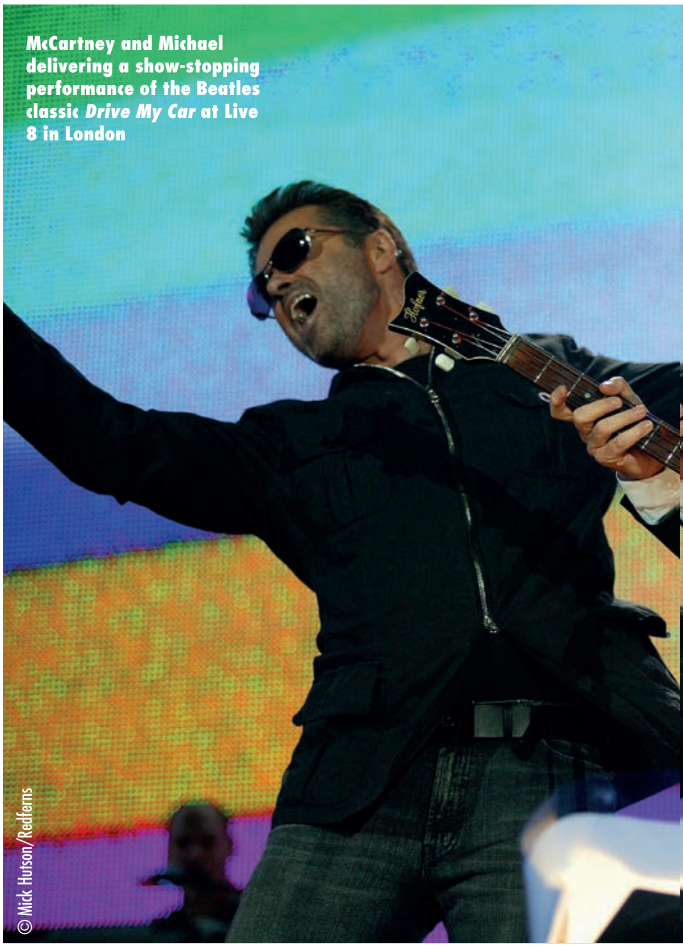
In July, George joined Paul McCartney to sing *Drive My Car* during the ex-Beatle's headline set in Hyde Park for Live 8, the show put together by Bob Geldof in support of the Make Poverty History campaign. The London leg of the world-straddling event had already witnessed U2, Coldplay, REM, Elton (accompanied, bewilderingly, by Pete Doherty), Madonna, The Who and a reformed Pink Floyd prior to McCartney's set.

The original plan had been for George to sing a song solo at some point. "Well, to be honest with you, I did actually want to do a song of my own," he affirmed to Jo Whiley on the day. "I was going to do *Praying For Time* just with a piano. It would have been nice, because the lyric would have worked… but I have a head cold." He also went on to reveal that he and Paul were "doing some recording later this week… we're gonna do a version of one of my old songs called *Heal The Pain*, which I wrote as a tribute to him, and so I'm incredibly honoured that he's gonna sing it for me. Yeah, we're friends. We've been speaking for a while."

Just as everyone had thought *Patience* had run its course, George released a digital EP of *John And Elvis Are Dead*. Its format as a five-track EP meant it was ineligible for the chart and downloads wouldn't



© Dave Hogan/Live 8 via Getty Images



McCartney and Michael delivering a show-stopping performance of the Beatles classic ***Drive My Car*** at Live 8 in London

© Mick Hutson/Redferns

be counted by themselves for another few months, but the EP did quite well on the iTunes lists instead. Meanwhile, in September, a duet between George Michael and R&B legend Ray Charles, a version of Stevie Wonder's *Blame It On The Sun*, appeared on Charles' album of duets, *Genius And Friends*.

WILD SIDE OF LIFE

The year 2006 began rather inauspiciously for George when he was arrested after being found slumped asleep at the wheel of his car in central London. He was taken into custody at Hyde Park Corner on suspicion of possessing drugs, and eventually received a police caution for possessing marijuana, and attended Belgravia police station to receive a formal caution. The second drug, which was initially thought to be liquid ecstasy, was in fact legal poppers. He would also be questioned about an incident involving his Range Rover that April.

On a more cheerful note, Michael announced his first tour for 15 years – *25 Live*, a celebration of his 25 years in music since Wham! first charted. The 50 dates kicked off in Madrid that September, ending

George opening his first US tour in 17 years with a two-hour show at the San Diego Sports Arena on 17 June 2008

with five nights at London's Wembley Arena in December. It was an instant sell-out, breaking many venues' ticketing records, and would become the most commercially successful tour in Europe 2006-7. To celebrate, George released a brand-new single, *An Easier Affair*, which made a muted No.13 in the UK, though Italy and Hungary elevated it to No.1.

An Easier Affair would be one of three new tracks featured on *Twenty Five* that October, along with his duets with Mutya Buena on *This Is Not Real Love* and the new version of *Heal The Pain* with Paul McCartney. The two-disc set was divided into 'For Living' and 'For Loving' themes, and focused on a mix of album tracks and hits. It also saw the inclusion of a handful of Wham! tunes – *Everything She Wants*, *Freedom*, *Last Christmas* and *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go*. Wham!'s *If You Were There* appeared on the limited third disc entitled 'For The Loyal' alongside another new solo song, *Understand*. *Twenty Five* would mark the end of the contract with Sony; George was now a free agent once again.

George also featured on another star-packed album, this time Tony Bennett's rattle through the American songbook, *Duets: An American Classic*, singing on *How Do You Keep The Music Playing?*

At the end of October, a *South Bank Show* special was broadcast, which followed him preparing for his 25 Live tour. Due to high demand for tickets, further dates were announced across Europe for the summer, starting in Portugal in May and ending in Belfast in August. The tour also included two dates at London's newly-rebuilt Wembley Stadium.

In October, George appeared on BBC Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs* programme, and talked candidly to Kirsty Young about how he had regained his emotional and professional confidence and how he had always struggled with guilt. "I've spent much of the last 15 years trying to derail my own career, because it never seems to suffer," he reflected, "but I *do* suffer." His selections were Roxy Music's *Do The Strand*, Gnarls Barkley's *Crazy*, *Smells Like Teen Spirit* by Nirvana, *Being Boring* by Pet Shop Boys, *Paper Bag* by Goldfrapp, Kanye West's *Gold Digger*, and Rufus Wainwright's *Going To A Town*. The song he would save from the waves, he confessed, was Amy Winehouse's *Love Is A Losing Game*. He chose "any book of short stories by Doris Lessing" as his preferred book alongside the Bible and Shakespeare, and an Aston Martin DB9 as his luxury item.

> "I'VE SPENT THE LAST 15 YEARS TRYING TO DERAIL MY CAREER, BECAUSE IT NEVER SEEMS TO SUFFER. BUT I *DO* SUFFER."
>
> GEORGE MICHAEL

© Kevin Winter/Getty Images

George emerging relieved from Brent Magistrates Court after pleading guilty to a charge of driving while unfit through drugs on 8 May 2007

© Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images

George performs a solo rendition of *December Song* at the final of *The X Factor* – a performance which, if not for a record company miscalculation, could have resulted in a Christmas No.1

"NORMALLY, I AM BETTER AT WRITING ABOUT MISERY. THE GREAT THING IS THAT I STILL FEEL THE UNDYING LOVE"

GEORGE MICHAEL

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A third leg of the tour was announced for North America in 2008, with 21 dates across the US and Canada, his first tour there in 17 years. There were two more London dates, dubbed The Final Two, at London's Earl's Court in August. A couple of weeks after that, he was arrested again in a north London gents in possession of drugs believed to be crack cocaine and cannabis, but this time he was released with no further action taken. He ended the year with a free download on his site of *December Song (I Dreamed Of Christmas)*, available for Christmas and Boxing Day. It would get a wider release the following year.

The decade concluded with a relatively quiet year for George – at least in the public eye. He had postponed much of his schedule after his partner Kenny walked out on him around Christmas. Together they would remain business partners in their art gallery in Dallas, but whatever rumours swirled around the press over the year and whatever happened behind closed doors, George still managed to pop up unannounced to duet with Beyoncé at the O2 in June. In August it was officially confirmed that the 13-year relationship between George and Kenny was over.

Further distress came when George was involved in an accident in August after he'd allegedly driven his car at high speed into a lorry on the A34 near Newbury, Berkshire at 1am (he'd only just got his licence back after a two-year driving suspension). Speaking to Simon Hattenstone in *The Guardian* a few months later, George claimed "If that juggernaut had killed me, I think I'd be perfectly happy with the amount of quality music I have left in the world. My ego is sated."

As a busy decade – if not perhaps as tumultuous as previous ones – ended, George popped up on *The X Factor* final to perform *Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me* with eventual winner Joe McElderry, and also *December Song (I Dreamed Of Christmas)*. Most guests on *The X Factor* saw a massive upswing in their sales after a slot on the show, and in the case of *December Song*, physical copies sold out the next day, forcing the record company – who had released the track in collaboration with Island – to press up more. Unfortunately, by the time fresh stock reached the shops, the Christmas chart had been announced, so the song only reached No.14.

THE KEY RECORDINGS

GLOBAL POLITICS, THE REDEMPTION OF LOVE, ESCAPING TO THE CITY AND A BITTERSWEET WINTER TALE

SHOOT THE DOG

2002

A controversial release, with George sending himself up in a crude cartoon vision while taking aim at Bush and Blair's 'special relationship' with cameos for the Queen, Geri Halliwell and Philip Oakey's iconic lopsided haircut (a reference to the sample of the Human League's *Love Action* used in the song). It showcased George's ability to still get up people's noses, especially so with his American audience, who frankly didn't seem to want to have much to do with George after 1998's restroom arrest, and were easily appalled by literally anything (though George was compelled to apologise regardless). Bizarrely, the video was shown in tribute on ITV the day after his death rather than any of his 10 chart-toppers.

AMAZING

2004

A love song for his long-suffering fella Kenny Goss, *Amazing* also reminded George of when he used to go out dancing in the soul clubs of Harrow and Watford during his pre-Wham! days. He seems finally at ease at singing about another man on this breezin' pop stormer, and it served notice of the arrival of *Patience* – and better summed up the album than *Shoot The Dog* or *Freeek!* did – when released a fortnight beforehand in March 2004. "Normally, I am better at writing about misery," George allowed. "I think it's a great song for two people falling in love. The great thing is that I still feel the undying love. That was why it was easy for me to finish it with the same energy I started with."

FLAWLESS (GO TO THE CITY)

2004

Unconvinced he'd already delivered a gay anthem with *Outside*, George took The Ones' *Flawless* and, well, made it gayer. "When I was trying to decide whether to use that track or not, one night I arranged to meet this guy," he told *Attitude* in 2004. "I told him who I was but I don't think he really believed me. The truth of the matter is nothing happened, because this guy was so freaked out because he was a massive fan and just within two minutes of chatting to him about this and that, I asked him about music. He was talking about late 70s funk and all the stuff I like, and then he said 'but I love that *Flawless* track that came out last year'. And I thought 'Ah, someone is trying to tell me something…'"

DECEMBER SONG (I DREAMED OF CHRISTMAS)

1998

Built around a Frank Sinatra sample and co-written with his longtime collaborator David Austin, *December Song* had originally been earmarked for the Spice Girls or possibly Michael Bublé, but was kept by George instead and given as a 'gift' to his fans in 2008. A year later it was released as a single to coincide with his appearance on *The X Factor*. A melancholy gem about "watching TV all day", it chimed far more realistically with his fans than the likelihood of a snow-filled yule. Just as *Last Christmas* has proven, thanks to downloads, to be a festive chart evergreen, we're predicting that *December Song* will become a seasonal classic.

ALBUM INSIGHT

PATIENCE
GEORGE MICHAEL

GEORGE WAS BACK AFTER AN EIGHT-YEAR HIATUS, AND HIS FIFTH SOLO ALBUM PRESENTED TWO FACES – PULSATING DISCO INTERSPERSED WITH SOPHISTICATED, SUBLIMELY-WRITTEN BALLADS

IAN WADE

Recorded in sessions between 2000 and 2003, *Patience* certainly tested George Micheal's fans, coming eight years after his last 'proper' album *Older*. With no record company breathing down his neck, George was able to proceed at his own pace without any A&R interference, as David Austin recalled, "There's no budget working with George Michael, (*Patience*) took us, what, six years? Most people you know, do four weeks in the studio these days, and mix it in seven days, so certainly you've got the luxury in that."

David explained in 2009 that "there is a fantastic development team of five or so working together. We throw ideas around and mix it as we go along. We never mix it afterwards." This concurs with mastering engineer Tony Cousins – who as one of the founders of Metropolis Mastering, had worked on George's music since *Careless Whisper* – who recalled in *PSN Europe* magazine that George was "a perfectionist in the recording studio, which meant that there was rarely a great deal to do when it came to mastering. He had a deep understanding of production and studio processes. And he was fascinated by it all. The tapes that arrived were meticulous and really required very little work. That's not to say that I wasn't making changes here and there, but they were relatively minor – and that's a testament to his fastidiousness."

Explaining to *Attitude* at the time, George said, "There's something

THE SONGS ▶▶

1 PATIENCE
An elegant (John Lennon's old) piano-driven, and almost poetic, opener where George seems to gently despair at the dehumanisation of humanity. "Is it my imagination, or did God already leave the table?" evokes a man exasperated of what the world is becoming. God and Jesus long being hooks to express George's weariness with the ills of society and how the 21st century appeared to be increasingly distant from the things that mean the most.

2 AMAZING
Dedicated to his then-partner Kenny Goss, and sets up the album as a slightly more celebratory affair after the heartbreak and loss that infused *Older*. George said of *Amazing* that it was inspired by his going out to local soul clubs pre-fame. *Amazing* entered the UK chart at No.4 in 2004, ahead of the release of *Patience*, went on to become his most-downloaded track from the 21st century and his last Top 5 hit.

3 JOHN AND ELVIS ARE DEAD
Co-written with chum David Austin, *John And Elvis Are Dead* is about a man awaking from a 30-year coma to discover that, yes, some things have changed, and that John Lennon and Elvis Presley are no longer alive and life in general is a bit… shit. Quite how anyone would be kept in a coma for all that time is unaddressed, but hey. Perhaps overegging it, Marvin Gaye gets a mention as well as imagery of Freddie Mercury, Mother Teresa and Princess Diana populating the song's video, and the then-as-yet-not-departed Vivienne Westwood, David Bowie and Nelson Mandela.

4 CARS AND TRAINS
Over a clipped, clappy backing, each verse focuses on a form of self-destruction. The woman who cannot seem to escape a ruinous relationship, the young man who escapes into a life of prostitution and drugs, and a teenage mother. All appear to be in states where the only way out is a form of suicide that they are all undertaking with the paths they are on, and yet George is sympathetic to their plights.

5 ROUND HERE
A sublime reflection on his childhood, and teeming with nostalgic detail, *Round Here* sees George talking about his first day at school, meeting Andrew Ridgeley (the 'two little Hitlers' perception of Wham! might be a little OTT) and citing his love of The Specials and The Jam despite that love not exactly being reciprocated. *Round Here* is by far the album's highlight, even if the chart placing of 32 seems a little harsh. Mind you, *Freedom '90* only got to No.28, so the record-buying public really are clots at times.

6 SHOOT THE DOG
Despite the presence of a sample of The Human League's imperial *Love Action*, *Shoot The Dog* was a bit of an actual dog's dinner. Never one to shy away from politics – *Wham Rap! (Enjoy What You Do)* was his first single after all – George's swipe at the post-9/11 world and the relationship between Tony Blair and George Bush seemed a little heavy handed. "*Shoot The Dog* is simply my attempt to contribute to the public debate that I feel should be taking place regarding Iraq and Saddam Hussein," commented George of the promo. "I have tried to convey my message with humour, because the public is rightfully scared of these issues, and humour has often been a useful aide to political debate." Understandably not on the US version of the album.

7 MY MOTHER HAD A BROTHER
George said of this beautiful song that it was about his gay uncle, who died when George was born, as well as the suicide of his grandfather. "My mother had this fear of me being gay," he said in 2007. "She had this definite fear that I was going to be like her brother. She thought it meant I wouldn't cope with life." His poor old mum was the one who found both his grandfather and uncle's bodies, so you can understand her concerns for her son.

8 FLAWLESS (GO TO THE CITY)
Not even George could resist the charms of The Ones' superb 2001 banger *Flawless* which was already a gay anthem, but here he elevates it further by using it to underpin his ode to escape from a quiet, suffocating life and to head to a place where one could pursue their dreams of being their true selves. Yes, the enterprise may be daunting and they'll encounter difficulty, but the end result of a happier life will make it all worthwhile.

9 AMERICAN ANGEL
Pretty much another song about Kenny and the stability that his presence brought into George's life. Things were glum, empty and loveless before George's "horny cowboy with your stars and stripes" and his "Texan smile" – Kenny was indeed born in Texas – came along offering redemption and healing. George is indeed wary of loving and losing again after the heartbreak of Anselmo, but the power of love trumped everything.

10 PRECIOUS BOX
Over a backing that sounds like something that Underworld might have cooked up – and at over seven minutes, of a similar length too – themes of fantasising about someone who seemingly has it all, but like fashion, will soon find themselves out of favour – much like the reality TV stars of the era. Knowing that George was a big fan of the soaps, "Precious keeps me company" could also be about something as benign as George's television habits.

11 PLEASE SEND ME SOMEONE (ANSELMO'S SONG)
Featuring elements from the theme to the Bond film *Moonraker*, *Please Send Me Someone* sees George pleading with Anselmo to, um, send him someone to love. Anselmo will never be too far from George's thoughts, he was his first serious love affair after all – here, he's requesting that his angel helps him out to fill the gaping hole his loss created with lines such as, "Darlin' though I can't replace you, there's a space in my heart. A space that you left in my heart".

12 FREEEK! '04
Containing samples from *Try Again* by Aaliyah, *Breathe And Stop* by Q-Tip, and *N.T.* by Kool & the Gang, the '04 addition helpfully updates the by-now two-year-old single that George issued in 2002. George is again championing the values of being confident and liberated in his sex life.

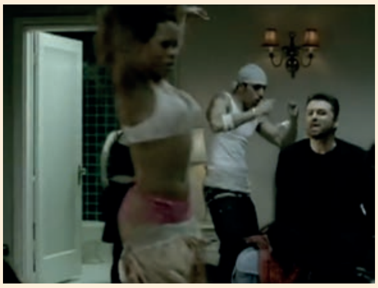
13 THROUGH
Seeing as George effectively launched the album by saying, "That's it! I'm off!" and claiming that he'd no longer be making studio albums, *Through* spells that out more thoroughly with lines such as "Is that enough? I think it's over/ See, everything has changed/ And all this hatred may just make me strong enough to walk away." It could be seen as George protesting too much about his lot, but in time would prove that he stuck to his guns and kept his word.

14 PATIENCE, PT. 2
Back on Lennon's piano again, the closing track *Patience Pt.2* is an instrumental version of the song that opened proceedings. Bookending the collection into a thematic whole.

THE VIDEOS

FREEEK!
Directed by Joseph Kahn, the futuristic lead single from Patience, *Freeek!* had a theme not unlike that of a more sexually-aggressive *Blade Runner*, with George as a sci-fi perv in a variety of cyborg get-ups. *Top Of The Pops* and *Pop Idol* got told off for showing bits of the vid before 9pm, but despite the hubbub the single didn't stick around long.

SHOOT THE DOG
Premiered as a 'world exclusive' both by MTV and VH1, *2DTV*'s broad satire sees George lampooning various eras of his career and taking potshots at the transatlantic "special relationship" between the UK and US. The promo was swiftly banned and caused much uproar, especially in America where – hilariously – it was never released at the time.



AMAZING
Directed by Matthew Rolston and filmed in a club setting in London, *Amazing*'s video shows a holographic performance by George projected in front of a long lounge, while the audience – also containing the singer – groove along to the track. Here's hoping it's not given any hologram makers any foolish ideas to 'resurrect' George in the future.

FLAWLESS (GO TO THE CITY)
Co-directed by George together with Andrew Trovaioli, this video opens with a man having a loud wee in a hotel room. He's joined by George and a cast of inhabitants in various states of undress. George sings from the bed as dancing – briefly syncronised – ensues. To close, George turns the lights off and leaves.

ROUND HERE
With regular collaborator, director Andy Morahan at the helm, *Round Here*'s promo features George recording the song in the studio. Images such as George's childhood home and school, plus general 'London back in the past' footage of tube stations, Chinatown and run-down high streets help illustrate the words and the nostalgic references he makes.

JOHN AND ELVIS ARE DEAD
With Anthea Benton in the director's chair, *John And Elvis Are Dead* was accompanied by what many believe to be one of George's best videos. Featuring shots of famous figures including Elton John, Siouxsee Sioux, Nelson Mandela, Freddie Mercury, Marvin Gaye and Diana, Princess of Wales, it was oticeable for its religious imagery.

about the vocals on this album that's a lot more confident, more certain. There are proclamations of love that I've never made before – certainly since Wham! – and then there's going further into the truth at the same time, like on *My Mother Had a Brother* or *Through*, they're trying to get closer to the truth."

Predominantly George originals, with the credits allowing for the samples and reinterpretations, he reunited with Johnny Douglas, who'd penned *Spinning The Wheel*, on co-writes on *Amazing* and *Cars And Trains*. George would also share writing and production credits with Niall Flynn, James Jackman and Ruadhri Cushnan on *Freeek! 04* and *American Angel*. He credited Douglas, Flynn and Jackman as 'The A Team', saying that, "Believe me, if any one knows the meaning of patience, it's these guys. This record has taken five long years, and each of us has had to deal with bereavement during that time."

George also used John Lennon's piano, a Steinway Z1 Upright used on *Imagine*, which he bought in auction for £1.6million, to allow it to be displayed in The Beatles Story museum as he said that it was "not the type of thing that should be in storage somewhere or being protected, it should be seen by people". He played it on the title track, which he'd also composed using it.

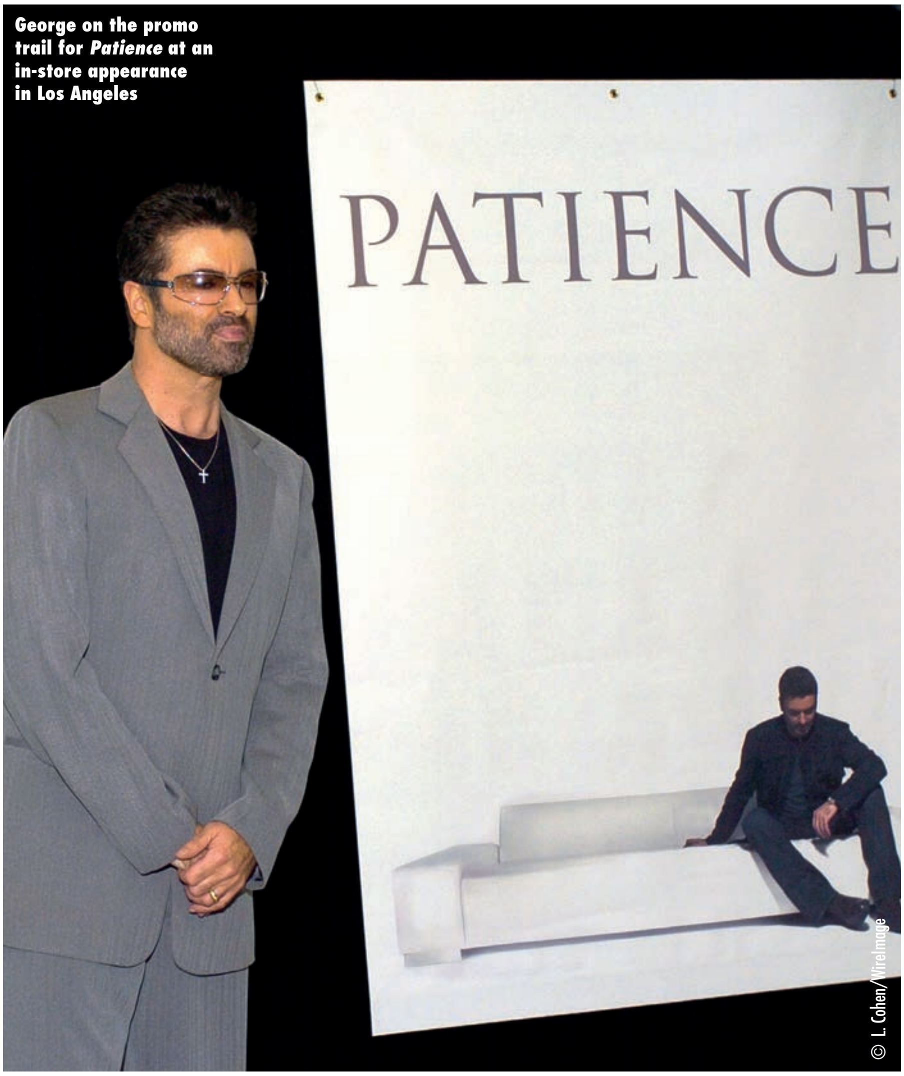
Co-written with David Austin, *John And Elvis Are Dead* was Austin playing to their strengths, as he told the *Daily Mail*: "I know what inspires George musically, especially with ballads. The right chord change can be a platform for him to take off. You can't manufacture that sort of relationship." George said that the song was "written for a generation before mine. Something that most people don't notice about my career is that I have the career principles of a 1970s rock star. The kind of principles everyone has given up now."

Round Here was "a very universal idea of the fact that you are going to live in roughly the same area your whole life. For some people, that is a choice. For others, it is not. I have been around the world many times. I have had the opportunity to go and stay anywhere. Yet, most of my life has been concentrated around a five-mile radius. I went to school, have an office, my mother was born a quarter of a mile from where I have an office. I have such affection for my hometown and memories that I live where I do."

The track *Flawless (Go To The City)* saw George take the original by New York trio The Ones, and basically sing over the top of it. Discussing with *Attitude* magazine in 2004, George said, "I wanted to camp it up a bit more as so many people I know loved that record."

Precious Box was George having a slight rail at reality TV culture, then in its ascendant: "The song is about the fact that ordinary people now see very ordinary people becoming wealthy and famous. That is creating a kind of hysteria in terms of people wanting to become famous and trying to find some way to become famous."

Of the heartbreaking *My Mother Had A Brother*, George said: "The lyrics are about



George on the promo trail for *Patience* at an in-store appearance in Los Angeles

"BELIEVE ME, I'LL BE OF VERY LITTLE INTEREST TO THE PRESS IN A CERTAIN NUMBER OF YEARS. I'LL HOPEFULLY BE A HAPPIER MAN, GIVING MY MUSIC AND ALSO DOING SOMETHING REALLY POSITIVE WITH MY MUSIC – I'LL REMOVE MYSELF FROM ALL THAT NEGATIVITY."

GEORGE MICHAEL

my uncle, who died suddenly and tragically, on the day that I was born. There's a mention of suicide and fear and a burden of hidden homosexuality. The number of people who walk around in life never being themselves. Being afraid of themselves, disagreeing with their internal reflection and suffering internal, physical heartache because they are well and truly closeted."

George once explained of his mother's fear that her son had the 'gay gene'. "I didn't know of the existence of my mother's closest sibling until I was 16 or 17, because he had killed himself," said Michael. "The idea of so wanting to leave this world and at the same time not wanting to because it would spoil the pregnancy of your sister, it's just horrible... And my mother told me she thought he was gay."

Speaking to *GQ* in 2004, George said, "She was so liberal as a parent that it didn't make sense that she might feel like that," he says now. "But I think it was because her brother Colin had killed himself the day after I was born, and she thought it was because he was gay. So I'm sure she was terrified of seeing anything gay about me because, to her, being gay meant misery. I totally understand that, even though she was misguided in worrying about it."

With orchestration added by James Bond composer David Arnold, almost-closer *Through* was essentially George's farewell to making albums. There's also another nod to 007 with the use of *Moonraker* in *Please Send Me Someone To Love (Anselmo's Song)*.

Patience was announced at the end of 2003, tying in with the news that George had re-signed with Sony for the album. While not performing spectacularly well in the charts, by comparison to his own high bar of sales that *Faith* had set, *Patience* still did very decent business, with one of the UK's biggest first week sales for an album, selling 275,000 copies, selling over a million across Europe and managing as-well-as-could-be-expected over in America, reaching No.12.

Critically, *Patience* garnered reasonably positive reviews. Some, such as *The Guardian*, suggested it was overlong and the high points were diminished by its length in a three-star review. "It gives the listener an awful lot to plough through, but anyone willing to persevere will find George Michael's finest work is buried within it." The BBC said that "There are no massive surprises with *Patience*, and Michael's core fans will be pleased that his musical bandwagon rolls on with reassuring continuity." *Uncut* sniffly awarded it one star, saying, "Many of the songs exhaust their melodic possibilities after a couple of minutes and then spend twice as much time vamping breathily."

Patience was billed as George retiring from the strenuous task of making albums. He'd long had his battles with labels and gone through the mill professionally somewhat, and announced to Jo Whiley ahead of release that he'd be stopping releasing full-length affairs in order to focus on releasing one-off songs on his website essentially for free, or at least with the opportunity for fans to donate to charity.

"I'm sure it's unprecedented, it's definitely unprecedented for someone who still sells records… I've been very well remunerated for my talents over the years so I really don't need the public's money.

"It does two things – it takes the pressure off to have a collection of songs every so many years, which is what nearly killed me.

"I'm not pretending I won't be famous anymore, but in the modern world if you take yourself out of the financial aspect of things, you're not making anybody any money, you're not losing anybody any money.

"Believe me, I'll be of very little interest to the press in a certain number of years. I'll hopefully be a happier man, giving my music and also doing something really positive with my music if people are generous enough to donate to the site. I'll remove myself from all that negativity."

So taken in retrospect as his last full-length work, *Patience* was no *Blackstar* or other parting gift to bequeath to his audience and the world. He kept himself busy with tours and continued to talk up future projects he was keen to finish, making music that will remain unlikely be released. Perhaps he had a rule of quality over quantity, because, let's be honest, he'd pretty much covered everything that mattered – sex, relationships, politics and love – and addressed what demons he may have had in his catalogue. As much as it would've been lovely if he'd pulled his finger out a bit more often and knocked out an album every couple of years, it's the relative brevity of his catalogue that makes his legend greater. *Patience* is by no means unloved. It could've benefitted from a little editing as there was no real need for previous singles *Shoot The Dog* and *Freeek!* to be on it either, and some tracks going on for six or seven minutes makes it feel like it's going on a bit. It may not have been home to the bangers he was known for, and saleswise was dwarfed by *Faith*, *Listen Without Prejudice* and *Older*, but it's an elegant and beautiful, unexpected coda to a spectacular career.

2010s

UNFINISHED SYMPHONY

A MUSICAL GAMBLE OF SPECTACULAR GRANDEUR, A SUMPTUOUS ALBUM, A SERIES OF WAKE-UP CALLS AND MISADVENTURES, HINTS OF NEW WORK TO COME, AND FINALLY – AND SHOCKINGLY – A CONCLUSION THAT STILL DRAWS A TEAR SEVEN YEARS ON

RIK FLYNN

The new decade would summon tragedy. First Bowie, then Prince… and on Christmas Day 2016, spirits were cruelly dimmed once more as news channels broke the story that George Michael was dead at just 53 years of age. No doubt utterly shellshocked, his family spoke only to confirm that he had passed away peacefully at his home in Oxfordshire. Some later claimed to have seen it coming. In the time leading up to his death, George had all but withdrawn from public life, preferring to remain a recluse in his Goring mansion than to return to London life and the ever-intrusive eyes of the press. On Christmas Eve he'd quietly watched as the yearly candlelit parade had passed by his window, and that was likely the last anyone saw of him alive.

His body was discovered in bed by boyfriend Fadi Fawaz on Christmas morning. By February, Fadi's frantic 999 call had somehow been leaked to the press; this was an example of the level of the cold-blooded intrusion into George Michael's life and, as was immediately clear, it wouldn't stop there. There would be no peace for the star, even after he'd passed on. But for all the headlines that targeted his sins, one last surprise would ensure George would ultimately be remembered as a saint.

He had not made it easy for himself. Between the beginning of 2010 and his passing, there had been a whole heap more trouble. George was involved in several nasty car accidents, he'd spent time behind bars, and he'd fought hard against – and, at times, succumbed to – his various addictions. On top of all that, he'd survived a seriously close brush with death that many put down to his lifestyle choices. Beyond the tribulations, however, the first half of this new decade revealed him to be a force of nature, offering up colossal vocal performances, putting in some seriously hard graft, and taking the biggest risk of his career thus far – one that ultimately paid off.

While the current decade would produce just one solitary album, it would be far more than just a collection of songs. *Symphonica* was a live project of epic proportions, a burst of creativity that brushed aside cheap swipes and character assassinations and focussed our view on a human being with a tremendous gift that – once more – vindicated him as a major figure in music. But it would be a while before this musical adieu took shape.

In February 2010, George and his 15-strong band brought the curtain down on a four-year, 114-date world tour with a return to Australia, his first dates on the continent since 1988. At three shows, George was on the form of his life with a greatest hits set that for *The Herald Sun* had "set the bar sky-high". At the last date in Melbourne, the 47,000-strong audience were left with their jaws on the floor. "If I'm a functioning drug addict," said George, not-so-subtly airing his contempt for the media, "I'm the best functioning drug addict you'll ever meet." Touché. With almost $15 million taken, the tour finale was clearly as lucrative as it was spectacular.

Facing the music: George arrives for his hearing at Highbury Magistrates' Court on August 24 2010, having admitted to driving under the influence. "It's so out of character for me to do something as irresponsible as that," he said. "It feels completely behind me."

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George, calm amidst the storm, leaving court knowing that in a few weeks he would be going to jail. Privately, he immediately entered rehab.

As ever with George's tumultuous life, troughs immediately followed peaks, and his chequered relationship with automobiles continued in July 2010 when he was found slumped at the wheel of his Range Rover having left the road and careered into the Hampstead branch of Snappy Snaps. While amusing for some (one joker scribbled 'WHAM!' on the broken shopfront), George found himself facing a five-year driving ban and an eight-week prison sentence having pleaded guilty to possession of cannabis and driving under the influence. "The only thing that Mr Michael has specifically asked his lawyers to address to the court is his profound shame and horror of having repeated the conduct of 2006," his QC told the court.

Released after just four weeks, George expanded on his incarceration on Radio 2's *Up Close With George Michael* programme. "[Pentonville] was quite an horrific experience," he recalled. "I was put in with the paedophiles and the bullies, and I didn't leave my cell very much in those few days." He was clearly eager to wipe the slate clean. "From the moment that last crash happened," he continued, "it kind of shook me out of my denial in a way the others hadn't, probably because there was a chance I'd go to prison. So the day after that crash I started on drug counselling and I was two weeks in detox, none of which I made public... it's so out of character for me to do something as irresponsible as that, let alone repeatedly, and it feels completely behind me."

As well as a renewed desire to get clean, Michael's stint in prison was a creative catalyst. "It was a very strange thing," he told Chris Evans. "When I came out I wrote seven or eight songs in the period of about two and a half weeks, and that just never happens... and I was thinking to myself, 'Christ! I should have been locked up years ago, I would have come up with a couple of great albums by now!'" Close friend comedian Dawn French saw a new man: "I spoke to him when he got out of the clink and he sounded happier than ever and more sorted and enthused – and reborn a little bit. So maybe a little time in there was the best thing for him."

A SENSE OF LIBERTY

While the tabloids indulged in yet another feeding frenzy, George seemed more upset by the critics' reaction to his latest undertaking, a cover of New Order's late-80s classic *True Faith*, released in March 2011 in support of Comic Relief. "I thought, why not just take a song that people would never expect to be interpreted in this way and actually show the pathos of that lyric, because it's amazing," said George of what he saw as a pertinent song "about the nature of addiction".

But unlike his stunning 1998 collaboration with Mary J Blige on Stevie Wonder's *As* (the takings of which he also gave to Comic Relief), *True Faith* was a distant cousin of the original. His voice hopelessly drowned in effects, it was not his finest hour – and the press quickly pounced. "Weirdly, it's not been done to enhance a high-octane, lose-your-mind-at-3am belter," opined *The Guardian*'s Michael Cragg of the record's usage of auto-tune. "It now sounds like it's being performed by a depressed Dalek." Ouch. "Thank you all, and f*** the journos who are trying to kill the record," came George's typically direct riposte on Twitter. The single made No.27.

On stage for the first night of his Australian tour at Burswood Dome on 20 February 2010. The press hailed the three dates as "incredible", "joyous" and "extraordinary"

© Paul Kane/Getty Images

"FROM THE MOMENT THAT LAST CRASH HAPPENED, IT SHOOK ME OUT OF MY DENIAL THE WAY THE OTHERS HADN'T"

GEORGE MICHAEL

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"IN THE RUN UP TO *SYMPHONICA*, I GENUINELY WAS SCARED THAT PEOPLE WOULDN'T COME WITH ME THIS TIME"

GEORGE MICHAEL

Yet another charitable dedication arrived in April when George offered up a second Stevie Wonder cover, *You And I*, as a wedding gift to Prince William and wife-to-be Kate Middleton. Fortunately leaving the auto-tune to one side, George issued the track as a free download, requesting fans make a contribution to the couple's Charitable Gift Fund. "This is a genuine gift, not a promo exercise," he clarified. "They'll be able to turn it into many, many donations." Even so, he had trouble clearing the track; "Those f***ers at EMI wanted to charge me for every download," George tweeted angrily. Luckily Wonder stepped in and temporarily waived his royalties. The serenade went down well with the royal couple, so much so that it reportedly got an airing at their reception.

MAN AND ORCHESTRA

Before his 50th birthday, and in great shape, Michael wanted to make a bold return to the live circuit, claiming to be more motivated than he'd been since the beginning of Wham! – but this time, a genuinely pioneering leap into the unknown would leave little to hide behind. *Symphonica* was to be a record of an intimate yet spectacular tour of opera houses and arenas across Europe, with George accompanied by a 40-piece orchestra.

George announcing his new tour at The Royal Opera House. "I need to keep driving, to appreciate what I have,' he told the press

The "re-energised" singer told the world about the project on 11 May, 2011. Broadcaster Paul Gambaccini hosted the press conference at the Royal Opera House; "Think about it," Gambaccini later enthused. "There's a guy at peak. He's actually holding a press conference in the Royal Opera House. You can't get higher market than that." There, George explained that his inspiration to tour with an orchestra had come from Tony Bennett, and that he'd always wanted to do it in order to focus on his voice as opposed to the showmanship required for previous tours. The album he described as being "far more true to myself in terms of lyrical content, in terms of the music that I listen to now, having been an out gay man for the best part of 13 or 14 years."

George also dropped a teaser that between dates he would be recording new material, "which is about as far away from this *Symphonica* idea as could be imagined". Here were two distinctly separate projects that illustrated the two opposing sides to George's character. "I'm really not interested or excited by repeating former successes," he explained. "At this stage in life there are two elements that I feel can be explored further; one is dance music and one is the idea of my voice, and I think there's always been a very obvious love from my fans for both sides of what I do... musically, both things will be very different to what most people are expecting".

Symphonica was a grand prospect, but not an easy one to pull off. For one, no one had ever done pop concerts in opera houses before. For George, the tireless preparation clearly kept him on the straight and narrow. "I knew that one of the things that was going to keep me clean was singing in front of an orchestra," he told Radio 2's Vicki Wickham. "To make the show really about my voice. I've never really been nervous about putting a tour together, but in the run up to the beginning of *Symphonica*, I genuinely was scared that maybe people wouldn't come with me this time."

George and manager David Austin visited producer Phil Ramone at Abbey Road. "We spoke to Phil about approaching some of the great arrangers, which we did, and we chose which tracks would go to who," explained Austin. "We decided we were going to record it, and George is such a perfectionist – it's not a case of going in and just doing it in the space of a week, these things take time. So I had this idea... that instead of him going into a studio and doing the vocals, we could take the vocals from each show."

Opening his set with a stirring rendition of *Through* from *Patience*, the set mixed tracks that George had never performed live (including new track *Where I Hope You Are*) with material from *Songs From The Last Century*, as well as songs from *Faith*, *Listen Without Prejudice*, *Older* and *Music From The Edge Of Heaven,* plus fresh covers of songs by artists such as Rufus Wainwright, Rhianna and Amy Winehouse.

With arrangements complete and renowned arranger and composer Steve Sidwell taking up the conductor's baton, Symphonica: The Orchestral Tour opened at Prague's stunning State Opera House, the first of 75 shows across 17 countries. Not since George's 2006 *MTV unplugged* performance had his voice been so exposed – and so incredible. "The first show was amazing," remembered tour photographer Caroline True. "700 people in the tiniest opera house in Prague – the most exquisite building." Amongst the more beautiful venues on the tour was the Arena di Verona, a 2000 year-old Roman amphitheatre, the Royal Albert Hall, the Royal Opera House, and the sumptuous late 19th century Palais Garnier opera

A NIGHT AT THE OPERA

CROWNING CONCERT, ICONIC VENUE

It was surely one of his most prized performances and a truly cherished memory for all involved. On 9 September 2012, George made history as the first contemporary artist to perform at the Palais Garnier opera house. Not only was it a crowning moment for the Symphonica tour, but the show incorporated a charity gala dinner to raise money for AIDS charity Sidaction. Paris' glitterati – including fashion designer Jean Paul Gaultier, actress Berenice Bejo and Charlie Chaplin's grand-daughter Dolores Chaplin – arrived en masse to witness the event. The show was filmed, and the resulting *Live At The Palais Garnier Opera House In Paris* was screened on the BBC in September 2012. A selection of George's choice vocal performances appeared amidst interviews, while intimate behind-the-scenes moments included dozing crew members, rehearsal footage, famous faces in the lobby, champagne flutes, and a charming scene featuring vocal warm-ups with his backing singers.

George described first seeing the venue when he was about 21: "I remember driving up to this fantastic building and thinking, 'This is the most glorious piece of architecture I've ever seen', and then I noticed the word 'opera' above the building and I remember thinking, 'How amazing must that venue be on the inside!' And I never dreamed that I would get to sing on that stage. It took me 38 years to get there, but my God, was it worth the wait."

The pin-drop beauty of his rendition of *A Different Corner* induces shivers down the spine, while the singer's duality is clear for all to see in his typically self-effacing narration as he relays his friend's critique of the song: 'It's beautiful. Pathetic, but beautiful". Elsewhere, various stories of love triangles, studio moments with producer Phil Ramone and shots of an enraptured audience make for superb viewing.

© David Wolff - Patrick/Redferns via Getty Images

house in Paris. When a few free dates came up at the opulent 1,979-seat Garnier, it was a rare opportunity that George grasped with both hands. One of the world's most impressive theatres, its interior boasted marble, stucco, velvet and gilding and a magnificent eight-ton bronze and crystal chandelier hanging proudly overhead. George would be the first pop artist to perform there.

A CLOSE CALL

Opulent venues aside, all was clearly not well. Having cancelled one of his Royal Albert Hall shows in late October due to a "viral infection", things were to get rapidly worse. As the tour reached Vienna, George was struck down with severe pneumonia and was rushed to hospital. The remainder of the tour was immediately cancelled. When he arrived at the hospital both of his lungs were almost completely depleted. His condition worsened and he slipped into a coma. It was "touch and go", as Austin vividly recalled. Luckily for George the hospital had the best respiratory unit in central Europe and, after a month in intensive care, he had survived. But only just.

Emerging severely shaken from his Highgate home, he choked back the tears. "I got steptococcha-something," he told the hastily-assembled media throng. "They spent three weeks keeping me alive, basically. I spent the last 10 days since I woke up literally thanking people for saving my life, which is something I've never had to do before and never want to do again." Later he would reveal to LBC radio's James O'Brien that doctors were concerned he had developed the rare 'Foreign Accent Syndrome'. On waking up from his coma, he had declared to nursing staff, "I'm king of the world!" in a West Country accent, before going on to entertain them with two days of Bristolian comedy routines.

Back in the UK for Christmas, George regained his strength before returning to the stage for the first time since his illness at the closing ceremony of the 2012 Summer Olympics. He performed *Freedom '90*, as well as debuting his dancefloor-friendly new single

White Light, inspired by his near-death experience. It was a move heavily criticised by some who saw it as shameless self-promotion, but George didn't care; his performance was well received and the rescheduled Symphonica tour dates were all ahead of him.

At his return show in Vienna he thanked the doctors that saved his life by donating 1000 free tickets to the hospital staff. "I left Vienna last year with some very painful memories," he declared, introducing a stirring rendition of *White Light*. "And I'll leave tonight with some amazing, amazing memories."

Three dates at London's Earl's Court served as a fitting denouement for what had been a joyous – albeit turbulent – tour. For George, the Royal Albert Hall was "probably the best performance as a vocalist I've given in my life."

And from those live performances came one powerful album – made with a legendary producer. "I knew I could never make *Symphonica* without Phil Ramone," George told the BBC. "It had been 12 years since we had made *Songs From The Last Century* together (or "Listen Without Purchasing" as he called it), so I knew he was a genius and I just had such fun with him... He understood more about music than anyone I had ever met, so I knew I could trust him completely with a tour as ambitious as this."

The album itself was made in tandem with the tour, some parts cut live, some laid down in the studio. Live recordings of George's vocals were shipped over to Ramone in New York, who then picked out his favourite takes to add to the string arrangements. The album was completed, but sadly it was to be Ramone's final engagement; at 79 years of age, the producer passed away on 30 March 2013. "It breaks my heart that he's not around to see this album released," said Michael. "What a great honour to be the last artist to have a piece of music released, that was produced by Phil Ramone."

Bizarre headlines followed in May 2013 when George was airlifted to hospital, this time having sustained a head injury falling from the passenger seat of his car on the M1 while travelling at speed.

© Jamie Squire/Getty Images

Above: George pictured performing his glorious and unforgettable Palais Garnier show in Paris in September 2012, and during the closing ceremony of the London Olympics

His injury was serious, evidenced by the five-inch scar on the back of his head.

Ignoring the inevitable tabloid conjecture, it was back to business when the album was presented to the press at Mayfair's Hamiltons Gallery in conjunction with an exhibition of Caroline True's tour photographs. *Symphonica* was finally released to the public on 14 March 2014, reaching No.1 in the charts immediately. The risk had paid off.

For the critics, Michael's sixth album was a mixed bag. *The Guardian* called it "a slightly confused live album", *The Independent* found it "an engaging set" yet "essentially a souvenir", while *Pop Matters* dubbed it "a heady, luxurious soirée". In truth though, with beautifully re-purposed tracks such as *Through*, *Praying For Time*, *One More Try*, *A Different Corner* and some gorgeous covers such as *First Time Ever*

NEVER GONNA DANCE AGAIN?

THOSE LOST ALBUM RUMOURS

At his 2011 press conference, George got fans excited with mention of a new dance album to run in tandem with *Symphonica*, to be recorded in sessions while on tour. "I'm looking to work with either gay or gay-friendly artists," he explained. "A gay collective, where some of the record is sung by myself and some sung by other artists – possibly unknown ones.

"Gay men's relationship with dance music doesn't end at the same time as straight people's does," he added. "I've lived with that music for a long time. It's still a big part of my life. There's some amazing material I've got my hands on, and in collaboration with a lot of dance producers I think it will be a stunning record."

But having dropped the cliff-hanger, the scent went cold. The tour ended and very little mention was made of this long-awaited material. Producer Naughty Boy told BBC *Newsbeat* that he had been working with the star prior to his death, but seemed unsure as to what would happen with the track. "There are a few recordings that are extraordinary pieces of writing," manager David Austin recently told the *Daily Star*, adding to the expectation. "They are finished, mastered, mixed and they're sitting there."

Then, in September 2017, shortly after Channel 4 screened the *Freedom* documentary, a remix of 1990 B-side *Fantasy* – reworked by Nile Rodgers – was released as his first posthumous single. For *Telegraph* critic Neil McCormick it was "pure joy… it brings us back to a singer in his prime". It certainly reminded us of *Freedom* and the carefree George of old, but that's because that's ostensibly what it was, albeit updated with Rodgers' modish guitar chops. "There is material there, but we would not do anything without the estate wanting to be involved," Sony CEO Rob Stringer told *Smooth Radio*. "I think there is stuff to come but not at the behest of commerciality. It will be for good reason. I know he was working on a dance album."

In February 2018 George's partner claimed on Twitter to be in possession of the finished album, and there have been veiled suggestions that something was coming – not least a tantalising statement on George's official site from sisters Melanie and Yioda: "Our aim is to carry on, as we know Yog would have wanted, to share and enjoy his precious legacy and to continue to bring you joy – through his extraordinarily beautiful music."

I Saw Your Face, and his delicate take on Terence Trent D'Arby's *Let Her Down Easy*, it was the perfect showcase for the one aspect of George the press could not ever attack – his voice.

THE SKY FALLS IN

Soon after the album's release, in May 2014, George was again rushed to hospital under mysterious circumstances. A statement said: "George was discharged last weekend and is well and resting. He is very much looking forward to the release of his new single in July. Given the personal nature of this matter there will be no further comment." The *Symphonica* single *Let Her Down Easy* managed No.53.

And then all went quiet. George had all but disappeared. When sighted in Zurich in 2015, reports surfaced that he was in rehab for drug addiction, claims denied by his PR. As ugly drug rumours and red-top tittle-tattle circulated, a tweet arrived shortly after his 52nd birthday: "To my lovelies and fans around the world, thank you for all the birthday wishes, I am truly overwhelmed. I am looking forward to spending it with friends and family. Thanks again, The Singing Greek."

At the time of his passing, George had almost finished his *Freedom* documentary. When aired by Channel 4 in October 2017, what had been intended to be an honest depiction of his story, directed and written by George himself, morphed into a deeply moving epitaph. George had finally found freedom from his demons and from the hounds that were endlessly on his tail. "In 1988 George Michael became the biggest-selling artist in the world," began his narration. "This is the story of how fame and tragedy intervened to change his life… forever."

To add to the heartbreak, pictures circulated depicting George at a local restaurant shortly before his death, accompanied by cruel jibes about his weight. Unsubstantiated stories of past overdoses followed, as did weak conjecture surrounding the circumstances of his death.

George's big secret, however, would put them all to shame: after his death, it was discovered that, for years, he had been giving millions of pounds to those in need – from privately paying for a couple to have IVF to donating thousands to the Thalassaemia Society. Comic Relief, the Terrence Higgins Trust, Sport Relief, Macmillan Cancer Support, Ethiopian famine relief, Help A London Child, Childline and several homeless charities had all benefitted from George's secret philanthropy.

At the 2017 BRIT awards, the stars paid their respects. "A supernova in a firmament of shining stars had been extinguished, and it felt like the sky had fallen in," said Andrew Ridgeley. It had been an annus horriblis for music, but where Bowie and Prince passed almost immediately to legend as mythical creatures far out of reach, losing George resonated in a different way. George was an open book who had revealed more of himself than any of his ilk. Talented, honest, funny, vulnerable and as fallible as the rest of us, he was the most human of superstars. Sadly, for George, he had nowhere to hide.

Three days after Christmas, fans continue to gather in numbed tribute outside Michael's home in Highgate, London, leaving letters, flowers, photographs and candles

© Jack Taylor/Getty Images

LOCKED UP IN HEAVEN

GEORGE MICHAEL MAY HAVE ONLY RELEASED FIVE SOLO STUDIO ALBUMS, BUT THERE ARE RUMOURS OF NEARLY AS MUCH UNRELEASED MATERIAL IN THE VAULTS. TRYING TO FIND OUT THE TRUTH OF WHAT GEORGE ACTUALLY RECORDED IN HIS LIFETIME CAN BE *SO DAMN HARD*, AS *CLASSIC POP* DISCOVERED WHEN WE INVESTIGATED THE STORY OF GEORGE'S UNFINISHED ALBUMS – AND WHY THEY'RE LIKELY TO REMAIN OFFICIALLY ELUSIVE….

JOHN EARLS

Since George Michael's death in 2016, only one proper unreleased song has emerged. The soundtrack to Paul Feig's 2019 romcom *Last Christmas* was a solid all-eras sampler of George's music, chiefly notable for featuring *This Is How (We Want You To Get High)*.

The reaction to that melancholic bop was indicative of why George kept such tight control of his music during his lifetime – and why his estate continues to do so since his passing. Released as a single alongside the soundtrack, the response to *This Is How…* was mixed at best. It's a perfectly decent song which would have fitted in well enough on *Patience*, but many commenters seemed to have expected a classic to rival *Outside*.

Prince had begun opening his extensive vaults before his death, allowing a so-so expanded version of *Purple Rain* in 2015. He had specified that he was happy for his unreleased music to emerge. Lavish boxsets based around Prince albums including *1999*, *Sign O' The Times* and *Diamonds And Pearls* have set the gold standard for the volume and quality of previously-unheard songs.

By contrast, it's unlikely we'll officially hear many more unreleased George Michael songs. They certainly exist. But both Andrew Ridgeley and George's later production partner James Jackman have told *Classic Pop* that George wanted to preserve the reputation of his existing catalogue by keeping it intact.

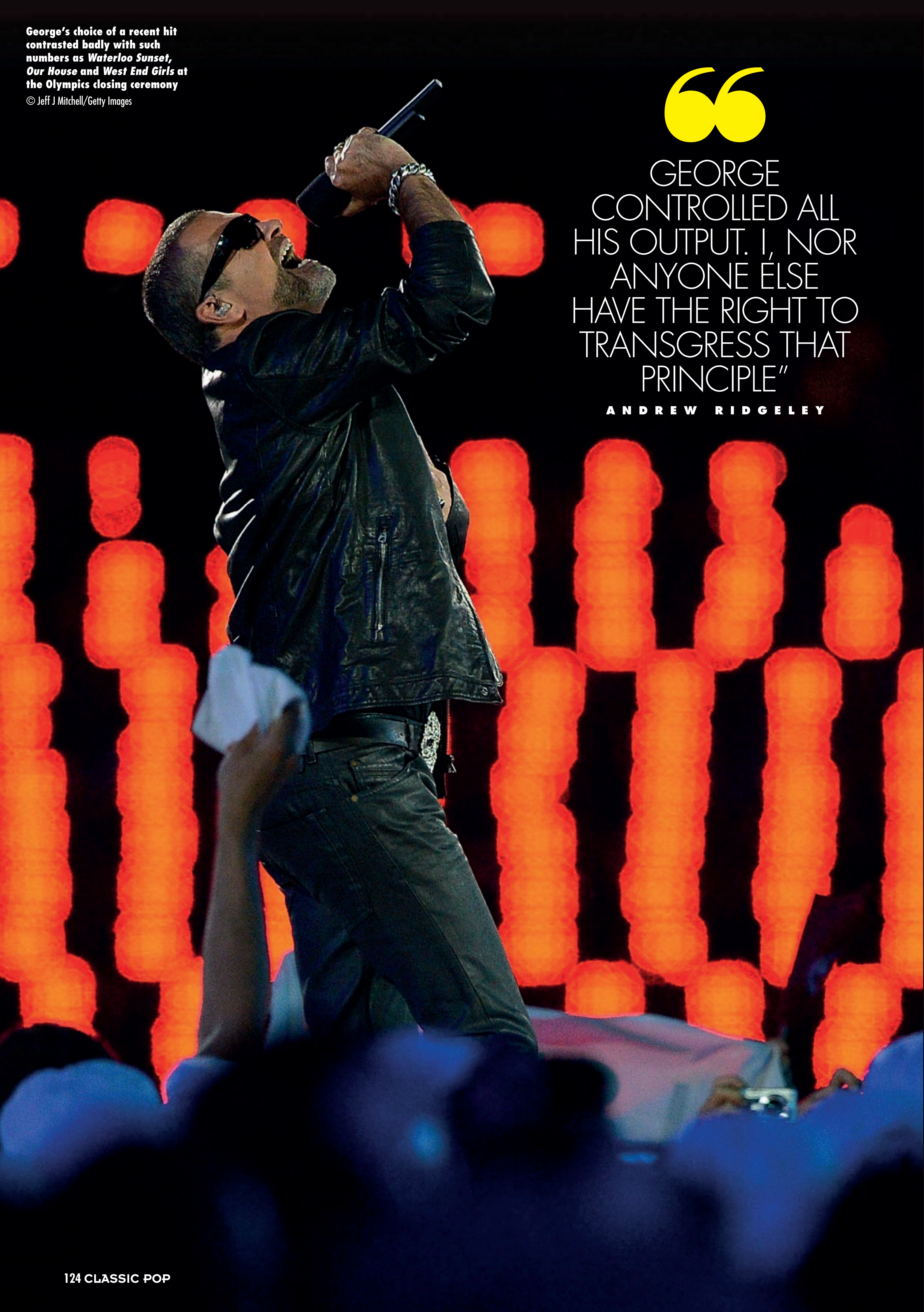
Speaking around the release of Netflix's 2023 Wham! documentary, Ridgeley said: "As a music fan, I know unreleased songs are gold dust and why people want to hear them, but it won't happen. Yog only wanted to present the gems – everything else he did wasn't for public consumption. It's why he was far from prolific."

Jackman said of George's solo music: "With a lot of artists, people posthumously put out all sorts of demos and you think, 'Why have you done that?' George's family don't want to suddenly pull out loads of demos from the vault. They only want songs George felt comfortable with."

There are strong rumours that a Wham! live album from 1985's Whamamerica! tour will eventually be released, most likely an official version of its heavily-bootlegged Philadelphia concert. But Andrew doubts the three unreleased Wham! songs he and George demoed – two pre-dating *Young Guns*, plus *Whamshake*, planned as the first single from *Make It Big* before George suddenly

“I'VE GOT SOME GREAT STUFF, AND I DON'T KNOW WHETHER I SHOULD RELEASE IT OR HOLD ON TO IT”

GEORGE MICHAEL



George's choice of a recent hit contrasted badly with such numbers as ***Waterloo Sunset, Our House*** and ***West End Girls*** at the Olympics closing ceremony

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"GEORGE CONTROLLED ALL HIS OUTPUT. I, NOR ANYONE ELSE HAVE THE RIGHT TO TRANSGRESS THAT PRINCIPLE"

ANDREW RIDGELEY

wrote *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go* instead – will ever emerge. His and George's attitude is that they weren't good enough then, so why bother now? This rules out a release for the infamous demo tape of their pre-Wham! ska band The Executive too.

The Executive's guitarist was schoolfriend David Austin, who now oversees George's estate with the singer's father Jack and sister Yioda. Intriguingly, Jackman confirmed to *Classic Pop* in 2019 that three further solo songs in addition to *This Is How (We Want You To Get High)* had been cleared for release. "How they'll come out and on what projects, I don't know," James admitted. Since *Last Christmas*, there has been no sign of their appearance.

The last genuinely new song George released in his lifetime was his version of Sananda Maitreya's 1993 song *Let Her Down Easy*, which featured on the *Symphonica* live album in 2014. It was the only one of 18 tracks George hadn't released as a studio version beforehand. Two other covers – Rihanna's *Russian Roulette* and Amy Winehouse's *Love Is A Losing Game* – were performed regularly on the 2011-12 tour, but don't feature on the album.

More significantly, George also performed a new song at the *Symphonica* shows. He described *Where I Hope You Are* as "My first real break-up song", about the end of his 13-year relationship with Kenny Goss. In 2012, George tweeted a link to his live performance of the ballad from Budapest via YouTube, giving it at least semi-official status. Yet the live version and any studio recording remain unreleased.

George wrote *Where I Hope You Are* while serving four weeks of his eight-week prison sentence in 2010 for crashing his car while under the influence of cannabis. Incarcerated first at HMP Pentonville Prison in London and then Highpoint Prison in Suffolk, George had what he called "An unprecedented burst of creativity", writing eight songs in just two-and-a-half weeks. From a singer more used to taking five years between albums, such creativity did indeed seem unprecedented. George described this creativity in Radio 2 documentary *Up Close With George Michael* in 2014, four years after his prison term.

The whereabouts of those other seven songs can be traced to *White Light*, George's final self-penned song, released in 2012, officially to mark the 30th anniversary of Wham!'s first single. *White Light* isn't a bad song at all, but it was damaged by George performing it instead of old classics at the London Olympics closing ceremony that summer. It became known as George's equivalent of Adam Ant singing *Vive Le Rock* at Live Aid.

While *Where I Hope You Are* shared the sombre mood of *Jesus To A Child*, *White Light* was a return to *Too Funky*'s vibe, furthered by its pulsating remixes from Kinky Roland and Jackman & Thomas. It's believed to be more typical of the escapist songs George wrote in prison. Rumours of a full album, also titled *White Light*, persist. But so do rumours that George was dissuaded from releasing it because of the poor reception to its lead single.

While bootlegs of most of George Michael's 1990s music can be found relatively easily, few tracks from the *White Light* sessions have leaked. Nor is there any evidence of his tantalising collaboration with Daft Punk, James Jackman memorably teasing that George was the original vocalist on the duo's 2005 single *Robot Rock* after visiting them at their Paris studio.

The only widely bootlegged song from the *White Light* era is *Every Other Lover In The World*. A rare outside production for George, it was made with Australian duo Stereogamous, who have also worked with Kylie, Jake Shears and Sia. In 2011, George tweeted that the single would be available soon. It remained unreleased, but is easy to find online. A remix by house DJ Marc Vedo is particularly tasty.

Above: The unofficial release of the 10 *Every Other Lover In The World* remixes

White Light and George's cover of New Order's *True Faith* from 2011 were released on his own record label, Aegean, an imprint of Island. George had joined Island in 2009 for his festive single *December Song (I Dreamed Of Christmas)*. He switched imprints to Virgin EMI for *Symphonica*, but the estate remains on good terms generally with the Universal group.

They also now have a good relationship with Sony, who released the *Last Christmas* soundtrack and Wham!'s singles compilation *Echoes From The Edge Of Heaven*, issued alongside the Netflix documentary.

But the rapprochement doesn't mean the appearance of George's most famous unreleased album is any more likely: dance

HOW TO KEEP LISTENING WITHOUT PREJUDICE

WHAT WE CAN HEAR OF TWO OF GEORGE'S LOST PROJECTS

The easiest way to hear the unreleased songs from *Listen Without Prejudice Vol. 2* is to Google their individual song titles. You'll discover the Balearic backing of *Lonely Nights* and *So Damn Hard* are so similar that George would probably have only chosen one for the finished album – most likely the slicker, more concise *Lonely Nights*. *Waiting For A Heart* is loose funk from the *Everything She Wants* playbook. Best of the bunch are *Thank You* and *Disco*. *Thank You* has a startlingly hard beat, remarkably fresh 28 years later. It's mostly instrumental, the sole vocals a heavily-treated unrecognisable growl. Better still is *Disco*, whose irresistible groove and celebratory vocals are a precursor to *Outside* eight years later. It also features a delicious house piano tucked away in the chorus.

While the cast list for The Trojan Souls is widely known, finished guest vocals are hard to come by. The 2CD version of *The Voice Of Reason* in circulation mostly comprises of instrumentals, with the titles pointing out who'd sing them: Seal's Song, Wendy Melvoin's Song and so on. Of these, the righteous brass of Stevie Wonder's Song and the funky Janet Jackson's Song are especially tantalising as both would merit epic vocals by their respective talents. Sade's song *WTF* is the only one with a title, but is in truth a little bland.

Guide vocals by George are in place for the tasteful ballads *You Slipped Away*, *Maybe It's Not Your Time* and the filmic *One Day I'll Know*, but it's not clear who those songs were intended for. And it'd be fascinating to know who was meant to sing the heightened Was (Not Was)-style funk of *Galaxy*.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, from the bootlegs the highlight of *The Voice Of Reason* is the only one to feature its singer's vocals – Elton John's *This Kind Of Love* is an extravagant Bond-theme drama.

A TROJAN RECORD

A BEHIND-THE-SCENES VIDEO OFFERS INSIGHTS INTO THE 1993 LOS ANGELES SESSIONS…

Early in 2017, weeks after George Michael's death, a video suddenly began circulating online: an 81-minute film of studio footage from the making of The Trojan Souls' album. It's unclear who leaked the footage, but the cameraman is clearly George's second-cousin Andros Georgiou, who George affectionately addresses throughout the footage.

In all honesty, you'd have to be a particularly hardcore fan to enjoy the film, which is watermarked as *The Trojan Souls: The Studio Sessions*. According to Andros' voiceover, it's mostly filmed during the second day of the album's sessions in Los Angeles. Andros approvingly notes the studio's swimming pool, before George and his partner Anselmo Feleppa drive up in the singer's open-top convertible.

So far, so glamorous, but what follows entirely captures the forensically intense and – to the outsider – deeply tedious reality of what goes into making an album. George and his team, including his longtime bassist Deon Estus, try to put together the ballad *One Day I'll Know*. Focusing on its intro, George offers suggestions for getting its dramatic swells just so: "Let's make the drums half as long", "Take the piano out" and endlessly on.

There is light relief, notably when George tells Andros to focus his camera to confirm that George is indeed wearing a baseball cap promoting his cousin's record label Hardback – promptly putting another one on instead as soon as the Hardback logo is in shot.

Mostly, though, the footage confirms how much work went into a song that remains unreleased – until Wendy Melvoin appears in the final quarter of the film to work on her song. The 13-minute jam Wendy and George work on is electrifying, highlighting why Wendy was such a mainstay of The Revolution with Prince.

If *The Trojan Souls: The Studio Sessions* isn't Oscar-worthy, it is a grim reminder of just how much toil George put into songs that are likely to never officially appear.

record *Listen Without Prejudice Vol. 2*. Recorded at the same time as the first volume, there are conflicting rumours behind its non-appearance. One is that Sony didn't want the second part to appear at the same time as Volume 1, allowing 1990's first part to soak up the initial sales. Sony's refusal to let George release two albums at the same time – which Geffen did the following year with Guns N' Roses' two-volume *Use Your Illusion* albums – was said to be part of George's dispute with the label.

However, a counter-rumour states that George simply decided against releasing a whole album of dance music after all. What's certain is that some of the songs from *Listen Without Prejudice Vol. 2* eventually appeared on *Red Hot + Dance*, the AIDS charity compilation George curated in 1992.

Red Hot + Dance followed 1990's exceptionally strong compilation *Red Hot + Blue*, which featured the likes of U2, Erasure, Neneh Cherry and Tom Waits covering Cole Porter songs. George persuaded Madonna, Seal, EMF, Lisa Stansfield and PM Dawn to donate rare remixes of hits to *Red Hot + Dance*, while he contributed three songs from *Listen Without Prejudice Vol. 2*, most notably *Too Funky*. His two other songs, *Do You Really Want To Know* and *Happy*, were exclusive to the compilation. The most commonly-circulated putative tracklisting for *Listen Without Prejudice Vol. 2* has 13 songs. *Crazyman Dance* is the B-side of *Too Funky*, while a cover of Adamski's *Killer* surfaced on 1993 EP *Five Live*.

Of the remaining six songs, only the six-and-a-half-minute *Pieces* isn't circulating widely online. The other five are: see our sidebar review. Who knows whether George really would have put his cover of Dead Or Alive's *You Spin Me Round* on an album? Another unreleased project, *Extended Plaything*, dates from the *Listen Without Prejudice* era. As far as *Classic Pop* can ascertain, it's an EP of songs from *Vol. 2*.

While it's uncertain whether or not the non-appearance of *Listen Without Prejudice Vol. 2* contributed to the breakdown of George's relationship with Sony, it's accepted that the commercial failure of *Red*

> "IT WASN'T THIS BIG MUSIC INDUSTRY ARRANGEMENT, I'VE JUST BEEN A FAN FOREVER"
>
> NAUGHTY BOY

Wendy Melvoin and George in the studio in Los Angeles, filmed during the early stages of the unfinished Trojan Souls project

Hot + Dance made him furious: the compilation failed to chart. Unhappy at a perceived lack of support from Sony for the project, George wanted out.

George turned to his second-cousin, would-be producer Andros Georgiou. He had already helped Andros secure his own label imprint within Sony, Hardback Records. Andros had previously been behind 1987 supergroup Boogie Box High, whose Top 10 cover of The Bee Gees' *Jive Talkin'* featured George, David Austin, The Style Council's Mick Talbot and, on guitar, Nick Heyward.

Andros suggested George write and produce an R&B album for guest vocalists to sing, under the name The Trojan Souls. Once word of George's dispute with Sony became known, Warner offered Andros £1 million to make the project a reality.

Determined to stiff Sony by making the most star-studded album imaginable for a new label, George and Andros set about persuading a host of talent onto the sessions. Those to sign up for The Trojan Souls' album, to be titled *The Voice Of Reason*, included Janet Jackson, Stevie Wonder, Seal, Bryan Ferry, Sade, Elton John, Anita Baker and Wendy & Lisa's Wendy Melvoin.

A 2CD bootleg of *The Voice Of Reason* is freely available to anyone who looks hard enough. It features the supposed 12-song tracklist on CD1, with an 11-track bonus disc adding demos and instrumental mixes. The Trojan Souls got as far as preparing its first single, a cover of McFadden And Whitehead's *Ain't No Stoppin' Us Now* sung by George himself. Its 12" and dub mixes are among those CD2 extras.

However, George's protracted dispute with Sony delayed any music appearing elsewhere. The AIDS diagnosis of his partner, Anselmo Feleppa, also led George to stop work to nurse Anselmo before his death in 1995.

Instead of Warner, George eventually signed to Virgin for *Older* in 1996. As late as 1998, Andros insisted The Trojan Souls was still a reality, telling *Dotmusic* the contractual disputes were nearly resolved. *The Voice Of Reason* would be out "early in the new millennium," Andros predicted.

What Andros didn't say was that The Trojan Souls had effectively been killed off in 1997, when Andros was fired by Aegean, allegedly for selling George's clothes and private possessions. Andros then began commenting regularly to newspapers about George's private life, eventually causing the singer to tweet in 2015: "I haven't seen this person in nearly 18 years."

One other potential unreleased George Michael project is with Naughty Boy. Like George, the producer grew up near Watford. Although out of favour now – he hasn't released any music since 2019 – Naughty Boy worked with Sam Smith, Ed Sheeran and Beyoncé. Shortly after George's death, he claimed they had "nearly finished" making a song together, telling Radio 1: "The song is amazing, but it's just a bit bittersweet right now." He said he "wouldn't rule out" their collaboration eventually being released.

Seven years on, any Naughty Boy is likely to remain on the shelf next to *Listen Without Prejudice Vol. 2* and *Whamshake*. Let's just hope the estate have something special planned for those three other officially forthcoming George Michael unreleased songs.

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APRIL 1992

IN TRIBUTE TO FREDDIE

When George Michael took to the Wembley stage for the Freddie Mercury Tribute Concert on 20 April 1992, it would go down as one of the most jaw-dropping performances of his career. Singing a trio of Queen songs – *'39*, *These Are The Days Of Our Lives* (a duet with Lisa Stansfield) and, most poignantly, a heaven-bound take of *Somebody To Love* – with the remaining members of the band, George gave his all. Not only had Freddie long been a shining light for George, but George's lover Anselmo Feleppa had also just been diagnosed with AIDS, only to be lost one year later. Michael had rehearsed with the band for a whole week prior to the show. "On television, I would never have the guts to go for that high note," he said after his performance. "Live, to however millions of people that was, that was probably the bravest note I ever hit." One of the singer's proudest moments, the concert raised millions for AIDS research and the live version of *Somebody To Love* took pride of place on the *Five Live* EP.

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